

The ELUSIVE GRASSHOPPER

A LONE PINE STORY



MALCOLM
SAVILLE

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The Elusive Grasshopper

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Foreword

This is a story about Romney Marsh - the little tract of land which is so unlike any other part of England that it has been called "the fifth quarter of the world." The Marsh stretches for about twenty miles from the ancient town of Rye in Sussex on the west to Hythe in Kent on the east. It is never more than eight miles in depth, but it is so flat that it appears to be very much bigger than it really is.

Centuries ago all this land was under the sea, but to-day it is a rich, fertile plain, feeding more sheep to the acre than any other part of the country. Great ditches, or dykes, bordered with whispering reeds, drain the Marsh, but even in the height of summer, when there is plenty of traffic on the road that links Folkestone and Hastings, most of this strange little land is lonely and silent but for the cry and song of birds and the call of sheep.

Marshmen have a saying, "Where the sea has once been it can come again," and it is true that all through the centuries since the monks of Canterbury began to reclaim this fertile plain, men have laboured to keep back the sea. Dymchurch Wall, along which you can walk yourself, is always under repair because in the autumn and spring, when the moon is full and the southwesterly gales roar up the Channel, this part of the coast takes a terrific pounding.

At the eastern extremity of Rye Bay is the great tongue of shingle called Dungeness, with its black and white lighthouse, enormous foghorn and wilderness of shacks, huts and bungalows. It is difficult to believe that there is any place in the world with more shingle than Dungeness, which, indeed, is being piled up here by the waves so fast that each year the lighthouse is several yards farther inland.

You can travel for yourself on the remarkable Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway to Dungeness and not only see the ships standing close in to the shore in exceptionally deep water, but explore the little station and restaurant, as Jon and Penny did, and even walk up the other deserted

railway line towards the ruined school which, for all I know, still stands there in a wilderness of shingle and nodding sea-poppies.

When you have seen the Marsh you will soon realize how ideal it was for smuggling not so very many years ago. Indeed, it was said, with some truth, that there was hardly a family living there not making money out of the illicit trading of Romney wool in exchange for lace, brandy and tobacco from France.

The Marsh villages described in this story and the countryside itself are real, with the exception of the little town I have named Dore Street. There really are places called Brookland, Brenzett, Snargate, Ivychurch and Guldeford. There really is a canal, which was built as a defence against Napoleon, running at the back of the Marsh under the hills from Rye to Hythe.

This story is complete in itself, but the principal characters, Jon and Penny Warrender, had their first adventure together in this part of the world in *The Gay Dolphin Adventure*, when they first met the sinister woman known as Miss Ballinger and her accomplice, "Slinky" Grandon.

So here they all are together again!

M. S.

The Lone Pine Club

If you have not read the first five Lone Pine books, you will probably enjoy this story more if you know something about the Club and its members before you begin.

The Club itself was started by some boys and girls at a lonely farmhouse called Witchend, in the highlands of Shropshire. The members of the Club are very ordinary boys and girls and are only remarkable in as much as they do not grow up! Readers who have already known them for some time do not want them to get any older, so they will continue to have adventures at their present ages.

The Club rules, which were originally signed in blood and are kept in a hidden place under the solitary pine tree in the first camping-place, are very simple and are set out in full in "Mystery at Witchend." The most important rule is "To be true to each other whatever happens," and this, as most people would agree, is a good maxim for us all. There are other rules about kindness to animals, and one honest statement that the Club was for "exploring, watching birds and trailing strangers." Up to now the Lone Piners have trailed strangers with more success and enthusiasm than they have watched birds, and it is true that they seem to have a happy knack of finding adventures.

As the members live many miles apart and all go to different schools - all, that is, except Tom, who works on his uncle's Shropshire farm - they can only meet in the holidays and sometimes, as in this adventure, it is not possible for them all to meet at the same time or in the same place. The most important headquarters is still the original camp at Witchend, but others have been established as necessity arose - one in a barn at a Shropshire farm called Seven Gates, another by the walls of a ruined castle at Clun and another in a cave in a lonely valley in the Stiperstones.

The Lone Piners' secret signal to each other is a whistled imitation of the peewit's plaintive call.

The Members

DAVID MORTON. The captain of the Club. Aged sixteen and sometimes, to his more impetuous friends, rather infuriatingly steady. He is a good leader and has never let any of his friends down. While his father was at the war he went with his mother to live at Witchend and has a brother and sister, who are twins. Although the Mortons' home is nearer to London they come to Witchend every holiday if they can.

MARY and RICHARD ("DICKIE") MORTON. These two are ten, and although they have now, for their own sakes and for some family peace and quiet, been sent to separate boarding schools, they are inseparable at all other times. They are alike in looks and speech and occasionally in thought. Although they are both rather cheeky and pleased with themselves, and are often extremely irritating to their friends and to grown-ups, they have the outstanding qualities of courage and loyalty. Both have a great sense of fun, but Mary is perhaps the leader, for, although sometimes a dreamer, she is more level-headed.

Although often in trouble, these two have never been known to do a really mean thing.

Their constant holiday companion, who is admitted by them all to be an honorary member of the Club, is a black Scottie dog named Macbeth - so named by Mr. Morton because in the days of his puppyhood he murdered sleep! Mackie loves them all, but most especially Mary, who has nearly wrecked many an adventure because she will stop and carry him when his short legs tire.

JONATHAN WARRENDER. Tall and bespectacled, Jon is one of those boys who finds exams easy. He is nearly seventeen, and, like most clever boys, is not very talkative. He has no father, is still at boarding school, but in the holidays lives with his mother, who owns the *Gay Dolphin* hotel in the little town of Rye, where he first met the Mortons and had an adventure with them. He is, as you will see for yourself in this new adventure, both resourceful and reliable.

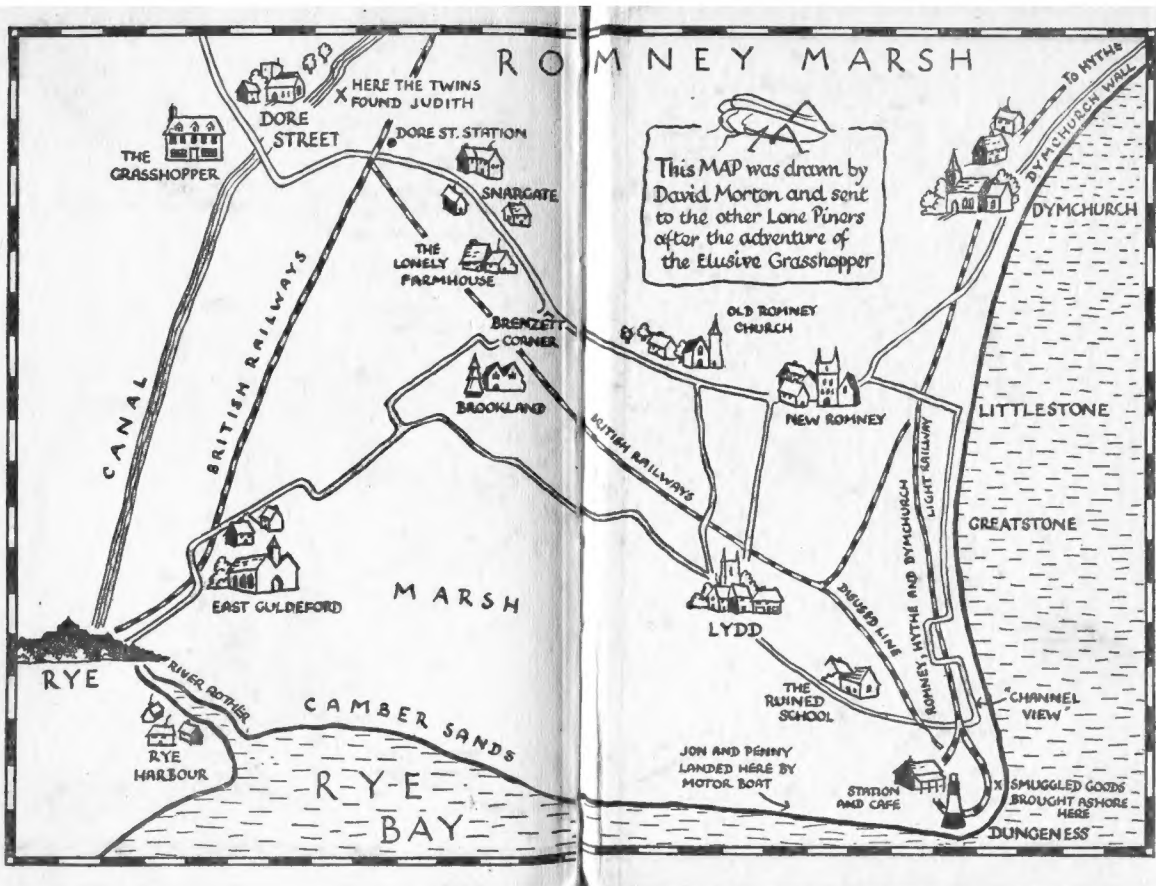
PENELOPE ("PENNY") WARRENDER. Jon's cousin and nearly one year younger. Her parents are abroad and she lives at the *Gay Dolphin* in the holidays. She is grey-eyed and red-haired and has all the qualities and defects that go with red hair! She is affectionate and impetuous, loyal and independent, and a rare fighter for her friends or for what she believes to be right. In many ways she is old for her years, and for as long as she can remember the most important person in her short and exciting life - for Penny makes the most commonplace events exciting - has been her cousin Jon, whom she teases and infuriates, but would cheerfully follow to the end of the world.

The other members of the Club do not appear in this story, but you will like to know something about them.

PETRONELLA ("PETER") STERLING. Peter is sixteen. She has no mother, brothers or sisters, and goes to boarding school in Shrewsbury. She lives with her father, who is in charge of a reservoir in the Shropshire hills, in a tiny house called Hatchholt, near Witchend, and is only really happy when she is roaming her beloved hills on her pony, Sally. Imagine her as tall and slim, with two fair plaits which she refuses to cut off, blue eyes and a clear, brown skin. Quiet, steady and fearless, she is the Vice-Captain of the Club and has not an enemy in the world. David Morton is her special friend.

TOM INGLES. A Londoner of fifteen and a half, who came to his uncle's farm near Witchend during the war and now never wants to go back. He is intensely proud of his membership of the Club, although he would never admit it. He is quick-witted and liked by everyone who knows him.

JENNY HARMAN. Jenny is nearly fifteen. She is a native of Shropshire and lives in a lonely village in the hills, so other Club members do not see her very often. Peter befriended her first when she needed a friend very badly, and although the others all tease her a little, she has plenty of pluck and does not mind what anyone else does so long as Tom will stand by her.



1. Together Again

Penelope Warrender, at nearly sixteen, was the sort of girl who became more obstinately English with the passing of every hour in a foreign country. On the September morning on which this story opens she had been in Paris with her cousin Jonathan for nearly three weeks, and although she had thoroughly enjoyed herself she had to admit that the main purpose of her visit - a rather more complete understanding of the French language - had not been fulfilled.

Penny, as she was always called, with her red curls, wide-set grey eyes and tip-tilted, freckled nose, was becoming very attractive, and it had not taken her long to realize that it was possible to express her needs in a strange land by other means than words. The family with whom they were staying in the Avenue de Versailles were charming, but only the daughter, Arlette (who looked twenty, though she was the same age as Jon and was coming back to England with them) could speak English. Madame and Monsieur Duchelle worked rather on the same principle as Penny herself and, although there had been some embarrassing moments and although Jon, who found languages easy, was often annoyed because she made no attempt to learn, an almost perfect understanding had been reached and Penny felt that she had done a great deal to strengthen Anglo-French relations!

Paris was very hot this morning and the pavements of the Avenue de l'Opera seemed particularly hard as the cousins pushed their way through the crowds. They looked so typically English and were arguing so amiably that several grown-ups turned to look back at them with a friendly smile.

Penny, bare-headed as usual, was wearing an emerald green linen frock and scarlet sandals, and although she had been shopping for two hours she looked surprisingly cool and fresh. Jon, who was six inches taller, would never look tidy and was, indeed, his mother's despair in this respect. His fair hair was thick and even after the most vigorous attention still looked like a "straw rick after a hurricane," as Penny had once told him! He wore spectacles, and although quite good at games, was extremely intelligent and found school work easy. This morning he was wearing light corduroy

slacks, a blue shirt with a badly-knotted tie, and a linen jacket. He looked down at Penny with an amused grin as she trotted along beside him.

"Never as long as I live," she was saying, "will I be anything but terrified of the traffic in this city. All the drivers are quite mad. Everything goes the wrong way on the wrong side of the road and much too fast. I never know when to cross and I can tell you, Jon, in case you don't know, that the time *not to* cross is when the gendarme on his little island in the middle waves his stick thing and blows his whistle and looks at you and says, '*Avance, mam'selle. Vite! Vite...*' When he says that everything else advances quicker than ever, especially cyclists, who are the maddest of them all... Don't go so fast, Jon. I want to look in this shop."

Jon stepped back with her and put his hand on her arm.

"I'm not going to look in any more shops. I'm sick of shops. You've been looking in shops all the morning and you've spent all your money, anyway. I'm going back home now, where I can rest my feet and where it will be cool... Arlette asked us to be early."

"Oh, did she? She didn't mention it to me, but I suppose she spoke to you in French so that I couldn't understand. Anyway, I'm not going back there yet. You're going to take me to a nice cafe and we'll sit down under a striped awning and you can buy me an orange drink... That is if you've got any money. Have you? I s'pose it will cost about a thousand francs... That's another thing about France. The money is quite crazy... *Please take me, Jon.* It's our last day in Paris, and I'd like you to do that. I want to watch all the smart people and sit there feeling grown-up with you... I don't specially mean you, of course, because I must say I think you look quite awful this morning... *Please, Jon.* I won't do any more window-shopping, I promise."

He looked down at her with tolerant amusement.

"I've made a vow," he smiled. "I'm never going into another French shop with you again. We've spent hours in and out of shops this morning when we ought to have been doing something else much more important."

"For instance?" Penny said as she dodged past a large American woman with horn-rimmed spectacles. "For instance, what? The Louvre, I s'pose?... Or not Versailles, Jon! You wouldn't want to go there again, would you? I got so tired of the hot gravel... Shopping is fun, Jon. It's something boys don't understand. I've got several things I wanted this morning, and I can only hope that you've got some money left because I haven't... Anyway, you spent a long time in that book-shop in the Rue de Rivoli. You've got a parcel in your pocket. What is it?"

"A book for Mother," he said as he guided her to a table on the pavement and pulled out her chair for her. "... I can't think how it is that you're always getting your own way, Newpenny. You've got a gift for it. What's in that enormous parcel you've been carrying half the morning? And why are you wearing gloves on a hot day like this?"

She smiled happily as she sat back in the shade. Jon was in a good mood when he called her Newpenny. "I'll tell you... And first of all I'll tell you that I think it's quite wonderful of you to have noticed that I am wearing gloves... It's the smart thing in Paris for a woman to wear gloves... I loathe gloves, especially on Sundays at home and at school, but Arlette wears gloves whenever she goes out with us and as I'm quite as up to date as she is I thought I would, too... I like to look smart when I'm out with you, Jonathan dear - specially as you're looking so neat and tidy yourself," and she glanced down demurely at the table as her cousin looked a little embarrassed.

"I never noticed that Arlette wears gloves," he admitted. "Anyway it seems crazy to me on a day as hot as this, but I don't think you look too bad, Newpenny. I'll tell Mother how careful you've been with your clothes... I don't think much of these French girls, anyway. They all look too grown-up."

Penny looked at him under her lashes. Perhaps it would be wiser not to mention Arlette again just yet? So she smiled brightly at him and looked round. Yes, Paris was fun. She was lucky to be here with such nice people. People, even foreigners, were fun when you got to know them.

A few yards away the traffic roared up and down the Avenue de l'Opera. The hot air, smelling of tar and petrol fumes, shimmered above the crowded pavements and all around her was a babel of chatter - French, English, Dutch, and tongues which meant nothing to her. An American woman with a loud voice jogged their table as she pushed by, and a Frenchman with a little beard smiled politely and instinctively at Penny from the pavement as he caught her eye, and then a waiter, in his long white apron, was at their side. She laughed at Jon when he ordered their drinks in French and the man replied in English.

"There you are, you see. There's no need to go to the trouble of learning this language. They all understand... Jon! I wonder why it is that, although at home we never seem to mind taking out a parcel of food and eating it when we're surrounded by wasps and flies, we never seem to want to eat and drink out of doors like they do in France. I like this. I like the way they do it. I think it's fun. It's the grandest thing about Paris, and whatever we do to-night I'm going to insist that we're taken to a cafe and have drinks out of doors like this... Why, Jon! What's this little parcel? For me?"

He nodded.

I got them while you kept me waiting for half an hour in that clothes shop. I thought you might like them... Might do for a sort of souvenir of Paris... Hope they're all right."

She tried to undo the string round the little parcel and then dragged off her smart gloves. There was a choky feeling in her throat and a pricking at the back of her eyes as she ripped off the paper and lifted the lid of the little box. There, in a nest of cotton-wool was a string of emerald green beads. They were very ordinary beads of a very ordinary colour, but she could find no words beyond "Thank you, Jon," when she looked up and saw him watching her.

"Sure they're all right?" he said. "I don't reckon to know much about these things, but you seem to have a lot of green things and-----"

"Oh, *shut up*," she whispered with a sob in her throat. "They're wonderful, and I'm so thrilled I can't even say thank you properly, Jon. I never thought

you'd think of me like that... Don't talk about it any more, 'cos I don't know what to say," and she bent her head, pushed the empty box and wrappings to the ground and fastened the necklace under her red curls as the waiter came back. He looked tired and hot and his face was a bad colour, but when Penny smiled as she thanked him for crushing the juice of the big orange into her iced glass, he looked at them both and smiled in return.

"You are here in Paris long? You like it, eh?"

"We're going home to-morrow, but we like Paris very much, thank you. We've been here three weeks."

The waiter flicked their table-top absentmindedly with the corner of a grubby napkin and looked up at the plane trees on the pavement. The leaves were already changing colour as the summer waned, and as the boy and the girl looked up at him they both felt that for a moment in his hard and busy life he was thinking not of Paris and his work, but of some memory that was more real to him than the present.

Then someone called "Waiter," and he smiled at them again. "I was in England once. One week. There you have many gardens - little gardens. I like them very much... You must come to Paris again... In the spring it is better... *Merci, monsieur.*"

"It's no use asking for another drink, Penny. We've spent just about everything I've got and I know you haven't any."

She shook her head and took the first delicious sip of iced juice.

"I'm no good at money even if I have it... I bought your mother a beautiful box, Jon."

"A box? What for?"

She looked a little uneasy.

"I'm not sure. It's just a very nice box with flowers painted on the lid. She'll like it, Jon. I'm sure she will... Do you like the beads now I've got them

on?"

He glanced up casually.

"Look all right to me," and he was now so off-hand that she could willingly have shaken him. This was just like Jon! For weeks he never seemed to take any notice of her at all - and, indeed, for the last ten days he had taken far more notice of Arlette and insisted upon speaking French with her when they had been out together - and then suddenly he would do something like these beads, which to her were quite wonderful. And then, just when she had made up her mind to be specially nice to him, he glanced at her as if he had already forgotten about her present and didn't even care what she looked like..

"I don't think I want to go back to-morrow," he was saying. "We've had a grand time, Penny, and the Duchelles have been so decent. What shall we do with Arlette when we get home? D'you think she'll like the *Dolphin*? I hope she does."

"She'll be a fool if she doesn't," Penny replied briskly. "I should think she'd have a wonderful time there, and if everything else fails, you'll always be able to practise your French on her. You'll be able to go for long walks together."

"Yes," Jon agreed. "We could do that," and then he threw back his head and roared with laughter, and she laughed, too, because she knew that he'd been teasing her.

"I want to come back to France often," Jon went on. "Not Paris next time. Maybe we could bring bikes and go for a tour. Or p'raps we could hitch-hike. Lots of people do, and you've got such wonderful gifts that I'm sure any car would stop for you... What about planning a holiday like that and getting the rest of the Lone Piners to come?"

Penny nodded. "Grand! Let's try it. I wonder what they're doing now? I sent Jenny a post card of the Eiffel Tower, and it would have been fun if we could have gone up to Shropshire with them. I s'pose the Mortons and Peter

are at Witchend by now? I should hate it if they had an adventure without us."

"We've had Paris, anyway," Jon said. "I think it's the most thrilling holiday I've ever had. I like foreign countries."

Penny put her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her folded hands.

"Maybe you do, Jon. Mummy and Daddy live in a foreign country, and I haven't seen them for three years, so perhaps that's one reason why I get a bit sick of foreign countries. You know how I love my home at the *Dolphin*, Jon, but however wonderful you both are to me, I can never forget that if my mother and father have a home that's where I ought to be... Oh, I know I've got to go to school; but I'll tell you one thing I've learned without school, and that is that English people who have to live out of England never want to live, or to go, anywhere else... While you were talking just now about coming abroad for another holiday I suddenly remembered home... Your home, Jon, and mine, too. The *Dolphin*, I mean, and the way the cats sit in the sunshine on the wall at the end of Trader's Street, and the way the cobbles hurt your feet through sandals - don't you dare laugh at me, Jon. If you do I'll *never* forgive you. Never!... And I'll make you take your beads back."

"I'm not laughing, Newpenny. Go on! What else were you thinking?"

"I can't tell you now. You've spoiled it... But, of course, neither you nor anybody else could spoil Rye... Oh! I was remembering the smell of mud and salt when the tide is out, and how the Marsh looks as if it's a million miles wide on a clear day, and how, in the winter, the mist covers it all like a blanket... I've never felt so homesick before, Jon. It's most peculiar, and the more I think of it the more tired I am of all these people and of Versailles and the silly Paris buses and the absurd way in which you have to buy those bits of tickets... I want Rye and the *Dolphin*, Jon... And I'll tell you what we'll do before we go back to school, and as Arlette will be with us she'll jolly well have to come as well and like it... Let's explore the Marsh properly, Jon. We've got a fortnight left. I want to go to all the little villages between us and Hythe - not just the ones we've been through on the bus, but the little places where the old smugglers worked and which we

always said we'd explore some day on our bikes. There's that place where the belfry of the church stands by itself in the churchyard, and New Romney and little villages with most peculiar names. There's a place right on the edge of the Marsh by the old canal that I want to see. It's called Dore Street----- *Jon!* You're not listening to me!"

He was looking over her shoulder at something she could not see herself, but he answered at once quietly and naturally.

"Don't turn round. Go on talking just as you were. I'm listening. *Go on, Penny!*"

She gulped and went on as brightly as she could. "There are lots of places like that we promised to explore, Jon. We've never even been to the lighthouse at Dungeness."

"No, we haven't," her cousin agreed. "I don't expect Mother will be very keen for us to spend two weeks with Arlette on Romney Marsh, though. I expect we'll have to take her to London and that sort of thing... Anyway, Penny, it *will* be nice to be home, I agree, but go on talking just the same - the second chap is going now."

"Are you crazy?" his cousin hissed at him. "What's happening? Can I turn round now? I can't think of anything else to say about Rye, anyway."

Jon leaned back and ran his fingers through his tousled hair. "It's all right now. You can relax... Let's see if we can scrape up enough francs to have another drink. I think you're going to need it because I believe I've got a shock for you."

Penny fumbled in her bag.

"Here's all I've got... If you've enough bus tickets to get us back to the flat, let's spend this now... Buck up and tell me, Jon."

The sad-looking waiter brought them two more drinks, and when he saw them counting out their francs he waved aside Jon's proffered tip.

"But no, monsieur. It is enough. I take no more because of the little gardens."

This seemed an odd reason; but they were very short of money, so Penny smiled at him instead.

"Now," she whispered, "tell me what happened. Quickly! And I mean quickly, Jon. You're so maddeningly slow when there's something important to be told... Tell me what it is. You look worried!"

"Not exactly worried, but it's rather peculiar, Penny. While we were talking I noticed two men, out of the corner of my eye, come and sit down at that table behind you. I just thought to myself that they were French because one of them was waving his arms about rather, but it wasn't anything to take any special notice of, and, anyway, people were still going and coming all the time... I think it was just after you began to talk about home - Rye, I mean - that I noticed them again because the chap who was sitting facing me - and he wasn't as smartly dressed as the other one - yapped out something in French which sounded like 'I speak and you do not listen...' Then I realized that the other man, whose face I couldn't see because his back was to us, held up his hand as a sort of warning. I noticed that his hair was shiny with brilliantine, and then quite suddenly I realized that he was listening to you. I don't know whether you know it, Newpenny, but you have a very clear and carrying voice. It's not exactly that you shout, *when* you have anything to say, but what you *do* say goes a very long way..."

"Don't be so infuriating, Jon. What happened next, and do you know who they were?"

Jon shook his head. "No, I don't think I do... Anyway, if you'll let me finish the story I'll get on. It was when you were speaking in such a beautiful way, with such beautiful words, about Rye and the *Dolphin* and then something about the Marsh, that the man who was listening so carefully to you turned round to see who it was speaking in such a beautiful voice... Of course, he could only see the back of your head, but he gave me a stare before muttering something to his companion and walking off as quickly as he could... As soon as the other chap had paid the waiter he went off, too - and that's all."

"Don't be ridiculous, Jon. There's something else - I know there is. Did you recognize the man who turned round?"

Jon shook his head as he got up and pulled back his cousin's chair.

"Come on. Time we went back... Oh, I don't know, Newpenny. It's crazy, I know, but just for a moment he reminded me of Slinky Grandon - the Slinky who worked with Miss Ballinger to try and get to our *Gay Dolphin* treasure."

They were out on the crowded pavement now, and for a moment were separated. Then Penny caught up her cousin again and put her hand on his sleeve.

"I see," she said slowly. "I don't think you'd have said that, Jon, unless you were fairly sure. You don't make things up, do you? You mean that, if it *was* Slinky, it may have been because when he heard someone talking about Rye and the *Dolphin*, it was a big surprise to him, too, and he turned round to see who it was and recognized you... Is that what you mean?"

As usual, when she was excited, Penny's speech became a little breathless and incoherent, but now Jon was feeling too serious even to smile at her involved sentence.

All he said was, "I s'pose that's what I mean, but it's impossible."

"I don't see why. Even if he's been in prison, I s'pose he has to come out some time. He always looked foreign, and I'm not a bit surprised that he's in Paris. What was the other man like?"

"Nasty. Just nasty. Ugly and mean, but nothing special... It was rather a shock seeing Slinky, if it *was* him, and I didn't want you to turn round and let him recognize you."

"Why?"

"I don't quite know. He wasn't very pleasant, was he?"

"He wasn't as bad as the Ballinger. I wonder what's happened to her? You haven't seen her in Paris, I suppose, and kept the news to yourself, have you?"

"No, I haven't. Anyway, it would be impossible to mistake her for anyone else, I should think."

"Did Slinky recognize you, Jon?"

"Don't keep on speaking of him as if it *was* him. We don't know. I only thought it was... I don't know if he recognized me. Once he had turned round he was so quick that I hardly had time to notice anything. He just muttered to the other man and went off into the crowd. I thought it was better for you to go on as if nothing had happened. I don't think he could have been sure about us - except, of course, that not many people of our age would sit out here in the summer hols, and talk about Rye and the *Dolphin*. It was your mention of the *Dolphin* that interested him, I think."

"I'm sure it was Slinky, Jon. Certain of it. I think it's all tremendously thrilling, and, of course, you've done the wrong thing."

"Oh! Thank you very much. What have I done wrong?"

"You ought to have left me alone and unprotected on a Paris boulevard and just followed him."

"I thought of that," Jon admitted, "but I didn't think you could be trusted alone. You can't speak the language and you would never have got back to the flat by yourself. You're helpless on these buses."

"I admit I'd rather go miles out of my way by the underground than cross any of these roads by myself, but that's only normal common sense. I s'pose you know where you're going now?"

"I do. We're in the Rue de Rivoli and we shall stop for the bus opposite the marks on the wall where the Germans executed French men and women during the occupation of Paris."

Penny was quiet while they waited in the queue. If it was Slinky she supposed that it was no business of theirs. The adventure of the *Gay Dolphin's* treasure was over long ago, although it would never be forgotten by any of them; but she did realize that Jon was more shaken by the chance meeting than he would admit, and it occurred to her, as he pushed her in the small of the back and helped her into the bus, that if either Grandon or Miss Ballinger met them again it was not likely that either would feel very well disposed towards them.

Jon was squashed against her, and when she tried to see him over her shoulder she realized that he was peering past the conductor at the landmarks which were already so familiar. She fingered the beads at her neck just to make sure that they were still there, and as they passed the Eiffel Tower he said, "There's a seat to your left, Penny. Get into it."

Then as she sat down thankfully he went on, "Forget all about that incident. Maybe it wasn't Slinky, and even if it was it's no business of ours. This is our last day, Penny, so let's enjoy ourselves."

The flat in which their hosts, the Duchelles, lived was five floors up in a big building. There were iron railings across the narrow french windows of the lounge and of the bedroom which Penny shared with Arlette, and neither of the Warrenders had yet got used to living so high above the street and looking down through the leaves of the plane trees at the dappled shadows on the pavement beneath.

They did not see very much of Monsieur Duchelle, for he was up early and home late. His wife was charming - tiny, dark and always smartly dressed. She knew no English and her husband only a few words, and so it was their daughter Arlette, whose English was excellent, and Jon, whose French was nearly as good, who kept communications open. It was only natural that Penny should resent this a little - not only because from custom and inclination she tended to look upon her cousin as her own property, but because Arlette was a beautiful and sophisticated girl. She was charming, generous and warm-hearted, too; but the truth was that she often made Penny feel like a schoolgirl, which annoyed the English girl very much.

She was thinking about Arlette as they got off the bus, crossed the road and waited in the vestibule for the lift which would take them up to the fifth floor. As they got in she turned impetuously to her cousin and said, "Jon! I generally say what I think, don't I? Well, I'm going to now, anyway. I wish Arlette wasn't coming back to Rye with us. We've only got a fortnight left, and I know it's horribly selfish, but we may have to do all sorts of things with her that I don't want to do, and now the more I think of it the more certain I am that she won't want to come exploring with us like we were saying just now... I mean she won't understand that we go about in old clothes - me, I mean, not you! You're always in awful old clothes - and she was packing all sorts of things she'll never want. I've tried to make her understand what it's like living in a little place like Rye, but I can't make much impression... She won't fit in with us, Jon. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Of course she will," Jon said lightly. "She's a very nice girl, and don't be so catty. The Duchelles have been wonderful to us, and we've got to do the same for Arlette. She'll fit in all right, you'll see, and it's up to you to be decent to her."

"I'll do my best," Penny said sweetly, "but I'm not at all sure that she's much influenced by women. I expect she needs the guidance and protection of strong men."

"Silly kid," Jon said as the lift stopped and he opened the gates. "You've got to learn to grow up... Hullo, Arlette! Here we are at last."

And with flaming cheeks, and the knowledge that Jon was right again in putting her in her place, Penny stepped out first and smiled at the French girl who had come out on to the landing to meet them.

"'Ullo!" Arlette said. "My packing it is done and I 'ave three boxes very full... You 'ave a nice morning, I 'ope..."

She slipped her arm through Penny's and gave her an affectionate squeeze as she led her into the flat. "I cannot say how excited I am about the to-morrow, nor how lucky I am because I come to England with friends."

Unexpectedly, Penny did something she had never done before. She turned and kissed the French girl on the cheek and said, "We're longing to have you, Arlette. We'll give you a wonderful time," and then she turned and put out her tongue at her cousin. "We will give her a wonderful time, won't we, Jonathan?"

When Jon grinned at her she remembered the green beads again and thought how beautiful Arlette was with her dark hair and big eyes and smart clothes.

The Warrenders had never quite got used to French meals. Indeed, after rationed food in England it was difficult to realize that there was nothing actually wrong in enjoying a plate of cold ham before a salad and then a steak with delicious and unusual cheese to follow.

Monsieur Duchelle was not home for lunch. Afterwards, because it was so hot and madame wanted to rest, they pulled down the green wooden-slatted blinds and sat and talked in the lounge. The sunlight made a striped pattern across the carpet and on the far wall, while the muted roar of the traffic rising from the street below made Penny very sleepy.

Arlette and Jon were speaking French now, and the latter, in his slow and deliberate way, was quite unperturbed by the girl's laughter. Jon had come to Paris to improve his French and intended to do so. Suddenly the telephone rang and Arlette, as she ran into the hall to answer it, roused Penny.

"Sorry I was such a fool before lunch," she said sleepily to Jon. "I was an idiot, and I'm still just as thrilled with the beads... Arlette asked me where I got them, and I said that a friend gave them to me..."

Before Jon could answer Arlette came back. Her eyes were very bright, and as she leaned over the back of a chair her cheeks were flushed with excitement.

"It is my father. He telephone from the office and say I am to ask you what you would wish to do to-night because it is the last... Anything, he say. We can do anything you wish and he will arrange. The Opera if you wish, or the

Ballet or the play if we find one you like. Or a ride in the auto to the country and we eat somewhere exciting... But you must say quick and he will arrange..."

"The Ballet, *please*," Penny began breathlessly, and then turned to see what Jon would say. But he was not looking excited - only puzzled, and perhaps a little anxious.

"What do you say, Jon?" Arlette persisted. "What do you like?"

"I'd like anything, thanks, Arlette. It's very kind of your father... Yes, the Ballet would be fine, and I know Penny enjoys that... But there's just one thing, and I know it sounds so crazy that I hardly like to ask..."

"Say in French," Arlette said. "But please to be soon. My father is waiting with the telephone."

"No. I don't think I can, Arlette. I'm sorry. What I wanted to ask you is whether your father knows a place - I expect it's a restaurant or a cafe - called La Cigale. Cigale means grasshopper in English... If there is such a place I would like it very much if we could go there for a meal this evening. I've got a very special reason for asking, and I do hope that you won't think I'm being rude..."

Both girls looked at him in astonishment as Arlette went back to the telephone, and as soon as the door closed Penny turned on him.

"What on earth are you talking about, Jon? Are you crazy?"

"Not really, Newpenny. It's just that I've been thinking over what happened this morning. I suppose I didn't really like to admit it at the time, but I'm as sure as I can be that it was Grandon, and I'm just as certain that he recognized us. I know I told you not to worry and said that it was no business of ours, but I can't get it out of my mind that he was anxious that we shouldn't recognize him, and if that is so he must be up to no good."

"But what was all that nonsense about a grasshopper?"

"Just before he bolted he said something to the other man. I couldn't catch it all, but I *thought* he said, 'The Grasshopper, then,' and something about to-night. I just thought that there might be a chance of following this up. I'd rather like to see if he avoided us again. It's exciting, Penny."

Then Arlette came back looking rather puzzled, and told them that her father would get seats for the Ballet, but had never heard of a place in Paris called "La Cigale."

"He is very amused at you, Jonathan, and say what have you been up to that you want to find a place like that and us all to come with you. I would like to know, too, if you have a secret, perhaps? Does Penny know? "

"Yes, Penny knows. It's just that we saw a man at a cafe this morning who we think we've seen before in England, but before we could speak to him he went away and said something like *La Cigale* to the man who was with him."

But is he a friend, this man, that you must see him again? "

"No, Arlette," Jon said while looking at his cousin. "He certainly wasn't a friend. Perhaps I could look in the telephone directory?"

There was no clue to be found there, and as the two girls leaned over Jon's shoulders while he turned the pages on his knee, Penny suddenly realized how unfair they were being to Arlette, who was obviously doing her best to be polite and not ask any more questions.

"We must tell Arlette, Jon," she said suddenly. "After all, she's coming to the *Dolphin* to-morrow and we can show her our room and where the secret passage starts. Let's tell her about the Ballinger and Slinky. The others wouldn't mind, and, anyway, Arlette is our friend."

It was to Jon's credit that he showed no surprise at Penny's change of heart.

"Of course we will," he said as he closed the directory and got up. "Come on, Arlette. Take us out in the Bois de Boulogne and we'll tell you our exciting story."

So Arlette, very excited, and Penny hardly less so, went to fetch their gloves and then together they went out into the sunshine. In the Bois they found a shady place and lay back and looked up through the leaves to the blue sky while Jon - with Penny interrupting from time to time - told Arlette the story of the *Gay Dolphin's* treasure, of how they found it first in spite of the woman who called herself Miss Ballinger and the man they had nicknamed Slinky, and of how its finding had done so much to help Mrs. Warrender when she needed that sort of help.

Soon Arlette was sitting up in excitement.

"And you mean that what you found was DIAMONDS - REAL DIAMONDS... yes?... And you have been with me nearly three weeks and you have not told me this before... And you say you are friends?... I say you are not. I do not like your secrets. To Penny I have told many things and secrets already, is it not so?"

"Oh, yes, Arlette darling," Penny said sleepily. "It is so, but those sort of things were different. Anyway, please don't get cross - translate cross, Jon, 'cos she won't know what that means - because you know it all now and just about this time to-morrow we'll be able to show you where it all really happened. It's a pity we've only seen Slinky-----"

"Oo is Slinkee? I do not understand."

"This man Grandon. The man with Miss Ballinger. The man Jon saw to-day... I was saying it's a pity we've only seen him on our very last day. I still think that Jon ought to have followed him... The trouble with Jon is that he's so horribly lazy. Do you understand 'lazy', Arlette?"

Arlette did know the meaning of that word, but she was finding it increasingly difficult to understand these nice but definitely peculiar English. She never quite knew when they were serious and when they were teasing each other and her. But they *were* nice. The boy - he was so young compared with the French boys she knew, but very clever, and so serious and untidy that he was almost *chic*. And Penny - only a baby, but sometimes when she looked at her perhaps not so young as she seemed at first. And with such wonderful hair, but her complexion - that was a

misfortune! So brown and freckled... But the two together, they did so much and did not talk about it. This adventure was amazing and exciting. Perhaps if they have that sort of adventure and excitement in England, then this next two weeks be more fun than she had imagined... Some French boys had told her that England was very wild and uncivilized, but perhaps she had better not say anything about that as the man her friends hated so had now been seen in Paris.

Then she looked down and saw Jon and Penny, one on each side of her, laughing up at her.

"You pull my leg," she said indignantly. "What you tell me is just a silly story..." Then, suspiciously to Jon, "It is right to say 'You pull my leg'? I cannot understand it, this saying, but it is an idiom I learn in the book."

They reassured her about the idiom and the truth of their story, and then strolled home in time to receive a wonderful welcome from Monsieur Duchelle, who had come home early because it was their last night in Paris. After that everything was too exciting for them to remember the sinister Slinky, for they all changed into their best clothes - even Jon had to wear his detested blue suit - and had a superb dinner out of doors at a restaurant near the Champs Elysees. Here they watched the other diners and the Parisians strolling under the trees. They saw the shadows lengthen over the parched grass and saw the lights of Paris come up until the queen of cities seemed to be wearing strings of jewels in her hair. The moon came up too - sliding silently up the purple velvet sky and shedding her radiance on the roof of the restaurant so that it gleamed like silver. When the coffee was brought, Monsieur Duchelle lit a cigar and smiled affectionately at Penny as she caught his eye. He knew what she meant when, with a slight catch in her voice, she said, "Thank you, monsieur. Thank you for everything. This is so wonderful that I shall never forget it."

Soon after they strolled across to the theatre and saw a succession of ballets so different from those they had seen in London by their own beloved Sadler's Wells Company that the evening became more exciting than ever. They saw one in which a cat danced over the roof-tops and another quite crazy one called "The Egg of the Cock," where a lot of cooks performed astonishing antics in a big kitchen.

When they came out soon after eleven they were taken to yet another cafe, where they sat outside and sipped iced drinks, but soon Penny was nodding with sleep and they went home in a taxi. She hardly realized that Madame Duchelle came in to say "Good night" and see that everything was packed ready for the morning, for they were leaving the Gare du Nord very early. She did not remember even saying "Good night" to Arlette; but she slept very soundly, with her green beads under her pillow.

Almost before she realized it, Arlette was shaking her and saying, "Quick! Quick, Penny! Only half an hour before we must go. We have all sleep late."

By the time she was ready Jon was piling their luggage outside the lift, while monsieur went to fetch his car. Madame decided that she would not be ready in time to come to the station, and their "Au revoirs" and thanks to her were brief and hurried.

Then the great station - somehow so very different from any London terminus. They found their reserved seats, bought some fruit, magazines and chocolate, scrambled into the corridor and called their "goodbyes" to the genial Monsieur Duchelle, who showed considerable emotion when bidding farewell to his only daughter. Then they were off and sat back in a silence which was, of course, broken by Penny.

"I hate and loathe *leaving* railway stations," she said. "Good-byes are abominable things, and there's always something sad about being seen off, or seeing people off. If you're standing on the platform you stand and wave to the wrong person and are certain to see someone crying harder than yourself."

Then she realized that Jon was looking meaningly at Arlette, who was next to her, and when she turned she was just in time to see the French girl's mouth quiver and a large tear trickle swiftly down her powdered nose.

"Come outside with me, Arlette," Penny said as she grabbed her friend's arm. "It's stuffy in here."

As they stood together in the swaying corridor and watched the grimy northern suburbs of the city slip behind them, Penny realized that Arlette was far more homesick already than she herself had felt at the cafe yesterday morning. After all, Arlette wasn't so very grown-up, however smart she looked! And she was nice, too, and was really thrilled to hear about their adventure. Perhaps, after all, they were going to have a lot of fun together!

She turned to say something of the sort, but before she could speak a rather ingratiating voice behind her said, "*Pardon, mam'zelle.*" She squashed herself automatically against the window so that the man might pass and then realized with a sudden sickening thrill that the man was Grandon. There was no doubt whatever. Slinky himself. Sallow complexion, well-greased and shiny black hair and the same little black line of a moustache on his upper lip. He was most expensively dressed and the hand that he raised to his face as he turned to look at the girls was carrying two rings.

Instinctively Penny tried to hide behind Arlette, but she was as sure as she could be that the recognition was mutual, although Grandon turned his eyes aside at once. Penny felt her heart thudding against her ribs as he disappeared at the end of the corridor without turning round. Then, "That's the man, Arlette. Please follow him if you can and see where he goes, and I'll tell Jon."

From the moment that Arlette turned without another word and went down the corridor after Grandon, Penny became her friend for life. She would never doubt again that Arlette might not really like adventures. Although, if she was asked to do something unusual, Penny invariably argued herself, she despised others who argued and did not get on with the job right away!



"GOOD MORNING, MR. GRANDON," SAID JON. "YOU REMEMBER

ME, DON'T YOU ? "

She banged the glass door of their carriage until everybody else in the compartment scowled. Jon was the last to look up from his paper, but he came out into the corridor at once when he recognized Penny.

"I've seen him this time. He's on this train. You're quite right, Jon. It is Slinky, looking more prosperous than in the old days. Arlette is following him - and here she is coming back!"

Jon took off his spectacles and polished them as he always did when excited and then beamed at Arlette.

"Thanks, Arlette. Where is he? I think I'll go and have a look."

"*Premiere classe*," the French girl said, with the glint of battle in her eye. "He smoke the cigar."

"You girls go and sit down and keep an eye on my seat. I'll be back in a sec."

But it was five minutes before he came back looking rather hot and bothered.

"It's him all right, although he denied it."

"Denied it?" Penny whispered. "What do you mean? Did you ask him?"

Jon laughed and wiped his forehead.

"Yes, I did. I soon spotted him. He was by himself in his compartment, and I was watching him through the glass when he looked up and saw me. I could see that he knew me so I opened the door and went in and said, 'Good morning, Mr. Grandon. I saw you yesterday, but couldn't be sure. You remember me, don't you?'"

"Jon!" Penny gasped in admiration. "How marvellous of you! What did he do?"

"Swore at me in French and waved his hands about and pretended that he didn't know any English and that his name wasn't Grandon... But he did understand me, and he's very worried and he can't get off the train until we get to Calais and I'm rather intrigued about all this. I never liked Mr. Grandon and I like him still less this morning... And he swore at me."

"How do you know?" Penny asked wickedly, while Arlette very sensibly added:

"If he is English, why does he pretend to be French? Perhaps I could speak to him, and I will soon tell you if he is really French. When shall I go, please?"

They laughed at her enthusiasm and told her that she couldn't do very much until they got on the boat, and the time passed quickly enough. In the excitement and bustle of getting aboard at Calais they missed Grandon, but later they saw him further along the deck.

Arlette regarded him with distaste. "I do not like him at all. He is a bad type. Perhaps I can speak to him and find out if he is French, and I will meet you here soon, but you must not let him see you."

Jon and Penny went forward and watched the white cliffs of home coming nearer, but it was a quarter of an hour before Arlette came back.

"I am sorry," she shrugged, "but I cannot speak to him. He goes to the place where he is drinking with other men all the time, but he is drinking beer, so I think he is English."

"That's really very clever of you, Arlette," Jon said. "We're proud of you! We shall be at Folkestone soon now, and my mother's old car with the hotel porter, Vasson, will be there to meet us... I think it's important for us to find out whether Grandon gets on to the London train, and I'm sure it's just as important for him not to know that either Penny or I are watching him. Do you think, Arlette, you could keep close to him as we go through the Customs and then maybe see if he gets on to the train? It would be wonderful if you could. We'll be waiting outside for you, of course."

Arlette looked a little apprehensive, so Penny spoke up for her.

"You're absolutely unreasonable, Jon. This is the first time Arlette has ever been to England and she doesn't know anything about Customs and passports and London trains. I agree that as you are the last one of us he saw that you had better keep out of the way. You take Arlette and look after her, but if she will lend me her scarf to cover up my head, and her coat, too, just so that I can disguise myself a bit, I'll put on my sun-glasses and maybe he won't recognize me. Shall we risk it?"

Jon looked at her admiringly.

"Bright little girl," he said.

The two girls went off below, and when they came back a few minutes later Jon admitted that Penny certainly did not look much like his cousin, for her red curls had disappeared and the Parisian coat she was wearing was too long. The dark glasses did the rest.

"It is a pity you couldn't do something about your nose," he said, "but I suppose nothing could alter that... Sorry you'll have to manage your own luggage, but I expect you'll get a porter, and if the Customs chap tries to be clever say you've become detached from the rest of your party... Off you go now, and get as near to him as you can..."

Penny gave them a wan smile and wandered off, but was much cheered when Jon caught her up and, with a hand on her shoulder, said, "Good luck, Newpenny. I've an idea that something is going to happen. It's up to you now. Don't miss him."

Arlette was now white with excitement, and as the boat slid gently against the quay and she looked up and saw the roofs of Folkestone and the harbour and railway station and the cliffs of England, she took Jon's arm and whispered, "You must not mind if I do not speak much. This is wonderful for me, and I do not know what to say."

Jon was too busy to say anything, anyway, for he had just found a porter in a blue jersey who was staggering under the weight of Arlette's luggage. He

looked round for Penny, but could not see her, and then they were caught in the crush of passengers and joined the queue winding its way into the Customs shed.

"Don't look round for her now," Jon whispered. "Grandon may have spotted us. Just look as if the only thing which worries us is getting out as quickly as possible."

They had little difficulty with the Customs, although Arlette answered a lot of questions about her luggage and had to open one of the cases, and a quarter of an hour later they were outside and greeting Fred Vasson.

"Hullo, Fred," Jon said. "Nice to see you again. How's mother? Good! This is Mademoiselle Duchelle and Miss Penny will be along in a minute."

Arlette smiled radiantly at the first Englishman she had met on his own soil. She could hardly be expected to realize that Vasson's Sussex ancestors had quite likely fought with many of her countrymen in the days when it was the habit of the French to come sailing across the Channel she had just crossed for the first time, and sack the ports of Rye and Winchelsea.

She saw a little man whose brown face was a mass of wrinkles, and when he raised his hat and said, very slowly, "Good afternoon, miss, and very welcome you be," she saw that his greying hair was straw-coloured. She liked him. England was going to be wonderful.

Then their porter arrived with their luggage, which was then strapped on the back of the car.

Jon was looking anxious now and Vasson disapproving. He was very fond of Miss Penny, but did not feel that she was particularly reliable. Affectionate and friendly-like to be sure, but too quick for him. There was something odd about her absence, for young Jonathan had got something on his mind, and this foreign lass, who was certainly smart and lady-like, looked worried, too!

Another big car with a chauffeur at the wheel drew away and then suddenly there was a girl running towards them. Jon saw her, too, and ran to meet her

and take her suit-case. As she ran she snatched off a head-scarf and dark spectacles and Vasson recognized Penny.

"Hullo, Fred darling," she gasped. "Please, *please* be as quick as you can... You see that big expensive-looking car, ZXT 286, that's just gone off, Fred? *Of course you do!* There it is now at the corner. *Get in, Jon.* Quick, Arlette!... Please follow it, Fred..."

Vasson looked at her in amazement as she scrambled in beside him and turned round to the other two.

"It's all right. He's in that big car, and there was someone else I couldn't see waiting for him in the back. It's Grandon all right, and he was absolutely livid with rage at the Customs when they searched all his luggage. I couldn't get very near, but I'm sure he was speaking English, and I could see that his passport was British... I don't believe that he saw me... Fred! Do you hear me? Our old enemy, Slinky Grandon, is in that car. Do *please* catch him up. We want to see who it is with him."

Fred changed gear deliberately.

"Very pleased to see you again, I be, Miss Penny, but my job is to take you straight back to the *Dolphin*, where madam is waiting for you, and I'm not following any cars anywhere, not even if the King was in all of 'em, unless they're going the same road as I be a' goin'."

"I *beseech* you, Fred," Penny said with a catch in her voice. "I beg you to do this for me!... If I was only a man I'd *make* you. Do something, Jon. Make him catch that car."

"No need," Jon said as he leaned forward. "The traffic lights are red!"

With impassive face Fred drew up alongside ZXT just as the amber light appeared and the larger car slid forward gently. They all had a perfect view of the two passengers in the back. Grandon was easily recognizable and was waving his hands about as usual. His companion was a large and very expensively-dressed woman with untidy red hair.

"Jon!" gasped Penny. "That woman is the Ballinger."

Don't be silly," Jon said uneasily. "That woman had ginger hair - not as ginger as yours, of course, but definitely carrotty."

Penny overlooked the last insult.

"I know I'm right. She was smarter this time and not trying to look like an artist, and she's dyed her ugly hair, but she can't disguise her thick glasses... Jon! Can't you understand? They're together again, and that means trouble for somebody, and maybe an adventure for us... *Please* try and catch them, Fred."

2. The Bird-Watcher

But Fred never did catch the big black car with the ZXT number plate, although he kept it in sight until they reached Hythe. Nothing that Penny said could persuade him to do anything but to carry out his orders, and at last she gave up worrying him.

They were all very tired as they drove home across Romney Marsh. Arlette's eyes were wide with wonder when they came to Dymchurch, with its great wall built to keep back the sea, and then passed through New Romney with its long High Street which changed its width every hundred yards or so. Then the road turned inland across the windy levels to Brenzett and Brookland, where a wooden belfry stands in the churchyard instead of on the church. Soon they were able to see Rye, drowsing on its rock against a background of wooded hills at the edge of the Marsh. The evening light was touching her red roofs with a warm finger as Vasson drove across the bridge over the muddy Rother, swung right and then left under a battlemented gateway into a narrow street.

"It is like a little French town," Arlette smiled. "I did not know that England was like this."

After that there were meetings and greetings with Mrs. Warrender and the *Dolphin* itself to explore. Arlette was so excited about her room, just below Penny's, and took so long to unpack, that it was dinner-time before they realized it. They dined in Mrs. Warrender's private room, with candles in silver candlesticks lighting the table; and when Arlette glanced over at Penny, who was wearing a frock she had never seen before, she caught her eye and smiled.

"We're not always as grand as this, Arlette, but tonight is a special occasion."

Then Mrs. Warrender raised her glass and smiled too, and said in French that warmed their visitor's heart, "We are pleased to see you here, Arlette, and hope you will often come again."

Soon afterwards they went to bed, and Arlette knew no more until Penny wakened her next morning.

"I did bang on the door, but you were unconscious - asleep, I mean. I must remember that there are some English words you don't know yet. Its nearly nine o'clock, and as we've got a lot to do to-day and plenty to talk about, I think we ought to begin our day's work. Shall we go and wake Jon? He sleeps in the front. His mother spoils him. He's got a room where he can look right out down Trader's Street across the Marsh to the sea. He says the window was built specially for the benefit of smugglers so that a lighted lantern placed in it would be seen right down on the Marsh... Arlette! Are you listening to me? You're not to go to sleep again. We've got a secret passage to show you after breakfast, too."

This last remark roused Arlette and she sat up in bed and laughed.

"I will be quick," she said. "I will try. What shall I wear this morning? Where do we go?"

Penny tried to explain that something simple or even rough and ready, would do for Rye on her first morning, but she knew when she left her guest that the result of Arlette's efforts would be striking and that it would be a least three-quarters of an hour before she appeared.

The *Dolphin* was fairly full, and the guests still left in the dining-room looked up with interest when Arlette at last made her entrance and went over to the table in the corner which Mrs. Warrender used when she had meals in the public rooms.

"Am I late?" she smiled. "*Pardon, Madame.* Forgive me, please, but I sleep so well and there is much to do. Penny I have seen. Good morning, Jonathan... Now I get used to English breakfast. I think you have told me that you do not have much to eat in this country. It is not true. You pull my leg."

Out of the corner of her eye Penny noticed a very personable young man watching them from the next table.

"Behave yourself, Penny," Jon whispered. "I'm watching you. He's looking at Arlette, anyway. What shall we do to-day? I'm very intrigued about this Ballinger business."

"Let's show Arlette our room and then I'd like to send the others up in Shropshire a telegram to say we've seen that woman again... That will surprise them, whatever they may have been doing."

So after breakfast Jon fetched a big key and led the way up the narrow little staircase to the landing outside Penny's room. They showed Arlette the hole in the wooden panelling opposite the door and told her how to insert her finger and feel for the wooden latch which opened another door leading to a still narrower staircase. There was not room for the three of them on the tiny landing above, so Penny stayed below.

"Show her how to open the door, Jon. Let her go in first."

Arlette took the great key and with both hands turned it in the lock of the arched door with its great iron hinges, and stepped across the threshold into the room which Mrs. Warrender had given to Jon and Penny for their own use almost as soon as they had moved into the *Dolphin*. It was in this oak-panelled room, which once was used by smugglers, that they had found the first clue to the *Dolphin's* treasure, and here, later, behind the panelling of the fireplace, with David Morton and the twins they had discovered the entrance which led down to the tunnel under Trader's Passage.

The dust was thick everywhere this morning, and Jon, with a shamefaced grin, produced a grubby handkerchief and flicked the top of the table before inviting Arlette to sit on it.

"I think the chairs are even dirtier, Arlette. Do you like our room?"

Arlette did. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before, and by the time she had seen the panel of the passage open and sniffed with delicious foreboding the dank air which came up from the darkness below, she was ready for anything.

"We do not have things like this in France. I have the excitement vair, vair much... Is it that we go down the 'ole now? I am vair 'appy that I come to stay with you. All these things that 'appen, like Grandon yesterday and this place to-day, are new to me... I like England vair much..." and here she paused for breath and pressed her clasped hands above her heart.

Penny looked at the new Arlette curiously. Perhaps at the end of a fortnight she would have lost a few of her more obvious Parisian characteristics. If she was really going to like adventures and the sort of unusual things which Penny and Jon so often did together, they might have a lot of fun.

Then Jon caught her eye and winked before closing the panel.

"I don't think we'll go down there now, Arlette, but I promise that I will show you some time. We shall want torches when we do go. We're going into the town now because we want to send a telegram, and I'm sure you would like to look round."

Arlette flashed him a smile.

"I do anything you say, Jon. We 'ave the excitement another time. What do we do now about the Grandon man and the fat woman 'oo is Penny's bad friend?"

"She's my deadly enemy, Arlette. We don't have. *bad* friends in England. Just friends or enemies... Come on! Let's go out into the sunshine."

At the foot of the stairs Arlette turned and whispered to her, "*Les gants?* The gloves? Do we wear zem in Rye?"

"Only on Sundays," Penny smiled.

In the Post Office Jon and Penny composed their telegram, which read:

David Morton, Witchend, Onnybrook, Shropshire.

We may want Lone Piners soon have just seen Ballinger again up to no good we wouldn't be surprised-----

Jon and Penny.

When they had seen this duly stamped and started on its way they remembered Arlette and turned round to see that she was being looked after by the pleasant young man they had noticed in the dining-room at breakfast. There was every indication that she found British manners and customs to her liking.

"Oh, Penny," she said as they joined her, "this man say that he see us at breakfast this morning and that it is vair lovely day."

Penny looked at the stranger as sternly as she could, but when he laughed at her, too, it seemed only sensible to smile back.

"So you're all staying at the *Dolphin*, are you?" the young man said. "It seems a nice little pub."

"So glad you think so," Jon said. "It belongs to my mother, and I know she'll like to know that you're pleased... This is our friend, Arlette Duchelle, and this, Penelope Warrender, my cousin. I'm Jonathan Warrender."

The stranger bowed.

"Thank you. I'm James Wilson... I'm going back to the hotel now, and if you're going the same way perhaps you'd care to stroll up with me. Have you lived in Rye long?"

"Long enough to love it," Penny said brightly as they went out into the street together. "Have you come to play golf or just to make new friends?"

"That's all right," Wilson said. "I don't mind a hit like that. I'm a friendly sort of chap, and I just thought you looked a nice lot of kids. Do you know this part of the country well? It's fairly new to me, although I've been reading it up lately."

Jon looked at Wilson curiously. He was pleasant enough, but somehow Jon felt that he was not all he pretended to be. It was just an impression, but he couldn't quite believe that the man was really as boyish and jolly as he tried

to appear. He was very nicely dressed, but there was a keen look in his eyes and a rather stubborn set to his jaw, and Jon was sure that he got into conversation with them because there was something which he thought they could tell him.

They strolled up Trader's Street together, and when they reached the *Dolphin* Penny said, "Well, good-bye, Mr. Wilson. I expect we shall see you at lunch and again at dinner. We're going to sit on this wall in the sunshine and watch all the guests coming in and out of the *Dolphin*... Is that your nice little car?"

"Yes, it is, and I dare not ask you to come for a ride else you'll snub me again. Let me sit on the wall with you. I want to ask somebody who really knows some questions about Romney Marsh and all this country round here. I like it, and when I come to a new place I make it my business to find out all I can about it, and the best people to ask are those who live there."

Then, before she could protest, he lifted Penny off her feet and sat her on the wall as if she were no heavier than a baby. He then glanced invitingly at Arlette, who was watching this by-play without amusement, as she edged a little closer to Jon.

But it was difficult to be angry with Wilson because he really was so friendly and jolly, and did seem keen on the country which meant so much to them. Only Arlette was bored, and she soon strolled off to play with a kitten rolling on the sunny step of the house opposite.

When she had gone Jon said suddenly, "Hope you don't think it rude, Mr. Wilson, but you are asking us a lot of questions. We're curious, too. Are you writing a book?"

"Or have you lost something?" Penny asked cheekily. "No, thank you. I can get down quite easily by myself... I think we ought to tell you that we know quite well that you're asking us questions because you think we're not so suspicious of you as some grown-ups would be. Well, you're wrong. We're jolly suspicious. Why don't you tell us why you want to know all these things?"

Wilson laughed and knocked out his pipe.

"Cunning little children, aren't you? I'll let you into my secret. I'm a journalist and am down here on a special job for my paper... Sorry I can't tell you more, and thanks for all your valuable help," and he strolled over towards the *Dolphin*, where Vasson was polishing the brass knocker on the open door.

Jon followed him.

"I'm interested in journalism, Mr. Wilson. Won't you tell us what story you're after? I promise we'll keep your secret, and I dare say that we could help you, too."

"That's all right, my lad. I'm grateful for what you've told me, but I don't reckon there's anything else you can do. Sorry I can't satisfy your curiosity yet. Maybe I'll tell you more after I've got my story. Cheerio!"

Penny's face was very red when Jon went back to her.

"I couldn't help hearing him, Jon. He snubbed you. I think he's a stuck-up prig, and I'm going to make it my business to bring him down a peg or two. He'll be sorry he ever came to the *Dolphin*!"

"That's a grand idea, of course! Mother works hard to find guests and you settle down to make them sorry they came! Don't worry about Wilson, Penny. We shall find out more about him sooner or later. He's after Fred now... Hullo, Arlette. Your friend has deserted us. What would you like to do this afternoon?"

"You have a bicycle for me, perhaps? We could ride on the straight roads down there wizout 'ills."

"So we could," Penny agreed. "I'm sure Mrs. Warrender would lend you her bicycle - I know she hates it... Let's go exploring like we said this afternoon, Jon. It's too late to do much more before lunch... Would you really like to do that, Arlette?"

Arlette thought that she would. "I would rather go in ze young man's car, but it would be nice to go out and see places... And to-night per'aps we go down ze dark 'ole in ze wall of your room?"

It was strange how Arlette's accent deteriorated as she became more excited. She was a very different girl now from the Arlette of the boulevards and of white gloves!

"If you'll both stay here," Jon said, "I'll fetch a map and we'll decide where to go. If Mother is in I'll ask about the bike, too, and meanwhile, Penny, you can ask Fred to blow up the tyres of ours."

"That's not the only thing I'm going to ask him," Penny replied. "I want to know what that bumptious young man has been talking about... Come with me, Arlette."

Fred Vasson viewed the approach of the two girls with some suspicion. He was always afraid that Penny was going to "get at him" in some way, and it was true that she generally was. And now there was this young lady from Paris, and she looked as if she could wheedle anything out of anybody!

"Hullo, Fred," Penny began. "I do hope you're pleased to see us. It's lovely to see you again. Did I tell you yesterday that I've missed you very much while we've been in Paris?... Don't look at me like that, Fred - all full of suspicion. I *did* miss you. Only the day before yesterday, when we were sitting at a cafe in the boulevard, I began to miss you and Rye, and I said so... You ask Jon, Fred. I did, honestly... Would you mind looking at our bikes for us, please, Fred? We're taking Arlette out exploring this afternoon... And talking about exploring, did that nice Mr. Wilson who was speaking to you just now want to know all about the Marsh? He was asking us questions about it, too."

"Now, Miss Penny," Fred said as he picked up his leather, "you know very well I got my work to do and no time to waste talkin'."

"You can talk quite easily while you polish. You know you can. I'll rub for you if you like... I'll let you into a secret, Fred. That Mr. Wilson is a journalist. He's come to Rye because he's got a special story to write for his

paper. All journalists are inquisitive, aren't they, Fred? and that's why he asked so many questions... But I wish I knew what he really wants to know and why. Did he tell you anything, Fred? Maybe he's going to put you in his paper?"

"I reckon he be collecting stories about Rye and the smugglers on the Marsh hereabouts," Vasson replied. "Maybe it's a book he's writing. There's many of these writing chaps comes to the *Dolphin*, as well you know, miss. Very pleasant spoken gentleman, I found Mr. Wilson and, I don't mind telling you, miss, that when I'm off duty this evening I'll be meeting him again down the town... Very intelligent gentleman, I found him," he went on, thinking of the two half-crowns now safely in his pocket.

"There's a thing I can't understand about you, Fred," Penny said as she leaned against the trunk of the wistaria which smothered the *Dolphin* in a cascade of mauve blossom in the early summer, "and when Arlette gets to know you better she won't understand either... You're just not *curious*, Fred... Here we are, having the first nice cosy little chat since yesterday when you met us at Folkestone, and you haven't asked us a *thing* about Slinky Grandon and Miss Ballinger. You don't even seem interested, Fred, and that's what puzzles me. Don't you want to know where it was that we saw Slinky again?"

Fred shook his grizzled head.

"No business o' mine, miss. I knew that man were no good just as soon as I set eyes on him, and I were proved right. If I see him round here again I'll knock him down, but I wouldn't cross the street to do it. He's not worth it."

"And Miss B., Fred? You haven't seen her again until yesterday?"

"Not me, miss, and I didn't see her yesterday. I was driving the car, and I don't see no cause for looking around when I'm doing that. That woman won't come this way again, I reckon, though I heard tell she's a clever one."

Penny laughed.

"Fred, you're marvellous. Isn't he, Arlette?... Hullo, Jon. Fred will do our bikes for us and we've just been asking him about the curious Mr. Wilson, but Fred isn't curious enough to ask questions himself. What do you think, Jon? He's going to meet Wilson secretly - at night."

Fred looked at Jon and closed one eye significantly.

"I'll be glad to get on with my work now," he said. "I'll do the bicycles afore lunch with pleasure."

"And if you hear Wilson's secret you'll tell us, won't you, Fred?" Penny pleaded. "What do you think he'd give to see *our* secret passage and to hear the story of the *Dolphin's* treasure?"

"He knows all about that, miss. I reckon that's why he came to the *Dolphin*."

"We were in the papers a bit, of course," Jon said, "but what is he so curious about, Fred?"

"I told Miss Penny. He's got to write summat about the Marsh and the like, and he wants a chat with some of the fisher chaps. I'm meeting him later and taking him down."

"He didn't ask questions about people staying here, did he, Fred?" Jon asked shrewdly.

Fred looked a little worried and paused before he answered. "I doan't reckon so, Mister Jonathan... Not to notice, loike. It be true he were very curious, but he won't never get anything loike that out o' me."

"I'm sure he won't," Penny agreed. "Nobody could. Come on, Jon. Let's look at the map and decide what to do. Shall we go to Camber and bathe?"

Fred smiled his slow smile at her and went in while Jon led the way back to the wall and spread his map over the sun-warmed bricks. Arlette was soon to learn that this wall was a favourite place of the Warrenders. The *Gay Dolphin* hotel was at the far right-hand end of Trader's Street, which

finished abruptly at this wall. A flight of shallow steps called Trader's Passage led down by the side of the hotel to the street by the river far below at the foot of the cliff. With your back to the wall you looked down the street and could watch, as Penny said, the cars and the people coming up to the *Dolphin*. You could watch the artists pitch their easels, too (for there are always artists in Rye), and the scarlet geraniums in the gay window-boxes of the other little houses in the street and the cats treading their delicate way over the cobbles.

And when you turned round and looked the other way the view took your breath away. To the left which was the east, stretched the vast flat plain of the Marsh - on some days so crystal clear and on others hazy and mysterious - which was green inland, but brown - almost golden - in the sunshine where the sands of Camber merged in the shingle wastes round Dungeness. Straight in front the muddy river Rother ran across the green levels to the huddle of roofs known as Rye Harbour and then to the sea. To the west, Rye's little sister town of Winchelsea drowsed on a tree-covered hill, and beyond that - beyond the sweep of Rye Bay - rose the Fairlight Hills guarding Hastings from the east.

And so there was every reason why Jon and Penny should love this wall, and indeed on the very first day on which they had come to the *Dolphin* - even before they had gone indoors - Mrs. Warrender had led them to the end of the street and showed them the view from this very place.

"I s'pose you have maps in France, Arlette?" Penny said as she took her friend's arm. "Come and look at this one. I should warn you that Jon has a passion for maps and compasses and notebooks and things like that. He's always working something out; but I believe a map does make a journey better fun."

They looked at the map together.

"Where is the place where the woman and the man in the car disappear yesterday?" Arlette said suddenly. "I forget his name, but perhaps we go there and see if we see zem again?"

"Hythe? That's too far on bikes, Arlette, and this map doesn't go as far. But here's the road shown as far as Dymchurch," and with the point of a stubby pencil Jon showed then how the road crossed the Marsh almost in a straight line through East Guldeford and Brookland and then, at Brenzett, turned sharply southeast through Old Romney to New Romney, which was about a mile from the sea, and then turned to follow the coast, which it reached at Dymchurch.

"Hythe is four miles farther on, and, of course, we'll go there one day, but it's too far to-day," Jon said, "and it's true that I can't get those two out of my head... Where would you like to go this afternoon, Arlette? We'd like you to choose. If you'd rather not go to the sea maybe you'd like Winchelsea."

Arlette put her pretty dark head between the red and yellow ones already bent over the map.

"If we do not go to 'Ythe, I would like to go somewhere ver', ver' wild and lonely because I do not see places like that in France. What is this place?" She put her finger on the most south-easterly point of the map, which was coloured brown and which showed no town or village, but only the black lines of what looked like two railways.

"Dungeness?" Penny said. "That will certainly be wild and lonely, Arlette. I've never been there, have you, Jon?"

"I've been to Lydd, which is the nearest town. I'd like to go if it's not too far. We can have a look at the lighthouse and the coastguard station, both of which are marked on the map... And do you see that a 'school' is marked near the railway line, which seems most unusual?"

"Could we go by train?" Penny asked hopefully. "It's rather a long ride, and Arlette may be tired after her journey."

"I shouldn't think trains run on that line very much now," Jon said. "Let's see if Fred knows."

They found Vasson in the yard oiling Penny's bicycle.

"Dungeness?" he said. "Ay! That be wild enough afore the war, when I last went. They tell me there's a lot of huts and shacks and the like down there, but 'tis only shingle and a lot o' thin grass, but with flowers everywhere in the summer. The road from Lydd would be rough, I reckon, although they did some rum things out there in the war and Jerry bombed it often enough. The railway? No, Mister Jonathan. I reckon you could walk easy enough along that old bit of line now. Maybe there's a train once a month for all I know... The other line on the map? I doan't be much good at reading maps, but come to think of it, that would be the liddle railway made about 1926 or so-----"

"Thanks, Fred," Jon replied. "We thought you'd know. Of course, I've read about the other line with its miniature engines and rolling stock, and I've always wanted to see it. It's called the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. Come to think of it, somebody told me not long ago that they've got the line open to Dungeness again now because the railway was taken over by the military in the war, so perhaps we shall see a train this afternoon."

"But, Jon," Penny pleaded, "surely we're not going all that way on bikes just to see a train? I like *people* and I'm already anxious about this place. It looks very bare on the map."

"You wait till you see one of these miniature trains actually carrying passengers. You'll see how exciting they are."

"I don't mind waiting a long time before I see that," Penny replied gloomily. "Let's go in to lunch. I think we're going to need all our strength this afternoon."

James Wilson glanced up from his sweet and smiled at them as they passed his table, but Penny looked straight ahead. Mrs. Warrender did not seem very impressed by the idea of a visit to Dungeness when they mentioned their plans for the afternoon.

"It seems an odd place to take Arlette for her first excursion in England," she said, "but of course she can borrow my bicycle. Don't forget to keep her

on the left-hand side of the road. It will be rather puzzling for her in the town."

When they fetched their bicycles later and went out into the Trader's Street it was Arlette who first noticed that Wilson's green two-seater had disappeared.

"Hold my bike, Jon," Penny said. "I'm curious about that young man. I want to see if his car is in the garage."

It was not.

"Good-bye, Fred," she called as he came to the kitchen door in his white coat. "Come and rescue us from the Dungeness desert if we're not back to dinner... Did you happen to see Mr. Wilson when he went off in his car?"

"No, miss. I didn't. I heard him go and maybe you'll run across him somewhere. He's gone what you calls exploring, too."

Arlette soon proved herself to be an expert cyclist, although before they were clear of the town she twice threw Rye's traffic into a state of confusion by her attempts to ride on what was to her, in both senses, the right side of the road.

They crossed the railway between Rye and Ashford twice by level crossings after East Guldeford, and then, before they got to Brookland, turned into a narrow lane which brought them, after many twists and turns, to the little town of Lydd. They had seen the great tower on its war-scarred church for some time, but Jon would not let them spend long exploring the place, for they had still three miles to go.

"I've just remembered another thing about Dungeness," he said as they got on their bicycles again, "and it's no use looking so bad-tempered either, Penny. A great strong girl like you ought not to be tired already. Look at Arlette! She's not complaining."

"I loathe you, Jonathan," Penny said, "and I warn you that if the wind is against us when we come back along this straight road you'll have to push

my bike... And if you think that Arlette has not complained about your mother's bicycle - particularly the saddle - then you're wrong. She's a disillusioned Frenchwoman... What else have you remembered?"

"That there's a bird sanctuary somewhere down here on the right. I'm glad I brought my binoculars."

"And your compass and a pocket sundial and a portable tent and cooking stove and a book of logarithm tables, I s'pose," Penny said triumphantly. "What a wonderful boy you are." Then she turned to Arlette before her cousin could answer.

"I must explain that the rest of England is not like this, Arlette. We have grass and hills and rivers and fields as well, but you did ask to come here and Jon just loves it because, before long, he's going to see a little train."

Arlette was beginning to understand Penny's sense of humour, although she could not yet appreciate the banter which passed so good-humouredly between the cousins without any noticeable effect upon either; but there did not seem any answer to this last remark except a polite smile. It was true that she would be very happy not to ride Mrs. Warrender's bicycle much longer because the straight road along which they were cycling was in very bad condition.

On each side of them stretched a wilderness of brown shingle interspersed with patches of vegetation. To their left they could see the fence and telegraph poles of the single-track branch line of the old Southern Railway which Vasson had told them was now disused. Far ahead of them the great black and white lighthouse, with a few buildings near it, dominated the scene.

Soon the direction of the road changed. Away to their left was a group of buildings which Jon said, after stopping and consulting the map, was Greatstone-on-Sea.

"And we shall cross the line of the Romney Railway in a sec," he went on, "and we should see the lifeboat station as well. I'm glad we came here, although it is rather a grim place."

"I'm very tired and I want a cup of tea," Penny said, "but I don't suppose anyone sells such a thing in this desert. Let's get as far as the lighthouse, anyway. We might as well die there against its walls!"

Some days later Jon tried to describe Dungeness to his mother and found it very difficult, although it was little more than a desert of shingle which had been made even uglier by slovenly and haphazard building of bungalows, shacks and old railway coaches. There were a few fishermen's sheds of tarred timber on the sea side of the road, besides the group of well-built cottages round the lighthouse and the square, white building which housed the great foghorn. Many of the little bungalows had been badly damaged by bombs and the blank eyes of their broken windows gave them a look of unheeded death. There is, perhaps, nothing more depressing than an untenanted house, but one that is empty, damaged and neglected as well is a horrid sight and even on this sunny afternoon Jon felt that this outpost was both curious and uncanny.

The sea was not visible from the road, for the latter ran behind a great bank of shingle, perhaps a quarter of a mile thick, and when Arlette said, "The sea? Where is she?" Penny put on her brakes and replied, "Let's leave our bikes here and go and find it." And Jon agreed.

They struggled over the loose stones and met the first human being they had seen since they arrived - a scowling fisherman in a blue jersey who only nodded in reply to Jon's "Good afternoon." They turned and watched his progress with astonishment, for he had flat boards strapped to his boots and so slid over, rather than scuffled through, the shingle. When they reached the top of the ridge over which he had first appeared they saw a very different sight; the beach sloped steeply down to the sea, which lay like a great blue pool below them. On their right was the actual tip of Dungeness, which was where the bank of shingle reached its greatest height. They could see at once that the sea on the eastern side of the point, which was where they were standing, was very deep, for although a fairly stiff wind was blowing from the south-west the water here was calm and still and the waves lapping the stones were only a few inches high. A few fishing-boats were quite close in to the shore and some bigger ships were steaming up the Channel.

"I remember reading somewhere," Jon said as they sat down on the beach, "that in a gale really big ships can shelter here and that sometimes there are twenty or thirty of them for a day or more... This is certainly a rum place. I can't think why anyone except fishermen and the chaps who work the lighthouse should want to live here. I'd like to come in the winter when there's a storm."

"On a bicycle, I suppose," Penny said. "That would be fun. You do have some wonderful ideas... Let's really make an effort now to find a cup of tea before we face the torture of going back... Are you sorry you came, Arlette?"

Arlette was too polite to say what she thought, but although she enjoyed Jon and Penny's company she was very tired and sore, and was quite certain that nothing would persuade her to come to this awful place again.

They struggled back over the shingle and then cycled towards the lighthouse, and it was just where the road turned sharply inland towards the group of buildings which Jon said must be the station of the light railway that Penny said, "There's a green two-seater car just like Wilson's... It is Wilson's. I remember the number."

The car was standing empty at the side of the road, and when Penny tried the door it was locked.

"How very peculiar," she said. "What is he doing out here? I wish I knew."

"I expect he's exploring like us," Jon replied, but he was looking very puzzled as he spoke.

"Is it that we come here just to see the Monsieur Wilson?" Arlette asked brightly. "He is a very jolly man."

Penny snorted almost indelicately. "Jolly! He's jolly stuck-up... And I think he's nosey and suspicious. What's he doing here, I'd like to know?"

"Fred told us, Penny. Don't be silly. He's after a story. He told us himself... Look! That is a cafe at the station, and I should think he's gone in there for a

cup of tea. Let's go and see."

I want the tea, but not Wilson," Penny said. "I shan't even speak to him if he is there."

The Dungeness terminus of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway is not much more than a hundred yards from the lighthouse and consists of only one platform a signal-box, the buildings housing the cafe, and a water tank filled with the aid of a windmill pump. In order to dispense with a turntable and double track for reversing the engine, the single line runs into the station on a wide loop which, after completing nearly a full circle, rejoins the main track.

They left their bicycles by the lighthouse and scrunched over the everlasting shingle to inspect the station, but looked into the cafe first. There was nobody else there and they were made very welcome, and while they were waiting and Jon was looking at some picture post cards of the railway Penny asked the manageress, "I wonder if our friend Mr. Wilson has been in this afternoon? We've seen his car over by the lighthouse and expected that he would be here. He's about twenty-five, I suppose - no hat, black hair a bit curly and a little black moustache. Rather brown-looking and wearing a check sports coat?"

Arlette listened to this accurate description of Penny's latest enemy with amazement and none of them were really surprised when the woman said, "Oh, yes, miss. He only left about half an hour ago. He asked a lot of questions, so I remember him well. A pleasant young gentleman, who seemed interested in us and this place... Now, here's your tea, and make the best of it because the train is due in ten minutes, and then we're full up for three-quarters of an hour until it goes back to Hythe."

Jon bolted his tea and five minutes later said, "I don't suppose you girls will be really interested, but I'm keen on this train. You do what you like; but shall we arrange to meet at the lighthouse, say, in an hour? I know I shall make you mad if I hang about here all the time."

Penny sighed. "Ever since he was a little boy he's been like this about engines, Arlette... All right, Jon. We'll amuse ourselves. Maybe we'll find

Wilson and discover what he really is doing?"

So Jon went out on to the platform with his map and camera and binoculars and watched the little train come puffing round the curve from the south and pull up triumphantly. At least forty passengers, including some boys and girls from a nearby holiday camp, got out of the smart Pullman coaches, but Jon was more interested in the locomotive, which was named *Hurricane* - a superb miniature of a "Pacific" engine - in a livery of "garter" blue with sparkling metal work.

The driver climbed out of his tiny cab and gave him a friendly smile. He was used to admiring and curious crowds, but he was proud of his job and his engine, and after Jon had asked a few intelligent questions he chatted to him while he was filling the water tank on the smart tender. They were still chatting when they were interrupted by a mild-looking little man who coughed apologetically to announce his presence and said, "Excuse me, driver, but I understand this train returns to Hythe in forty minutes' time. Would you be kind enough to confirm that?"

"Less than forty minutes now, sir. We've been here for about five."

"Thank you very much. I understand that there is a bird sanctuary not very far away, and I have heard, too, that Dungeness offers some very wonderful opportunities for the observation of wild life... I have my field-glasses with me, but, rather foolishly, have not brought my map... I wonder if you could direct me...?"



BERTRAM FRANCE

"WHY A SCHOOL IN THIS LONELY SPOT?" ASKED THE VAGUE
LITTLE MAN, PEERING AT THE MAP.

"I've got a map here, sir," Jon said, "and I believe it's true about the bird sanctuary. I want to go there myself one day, but I shouldn't think you would have much time now if you want to go back to Hythe by this train."

"Thank you, my boy. I should like to glance at the map," and he fumbled in his pocket and brought out a pair of old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles which sat very crookedly on his nose. He was a pleasant but vague little man; his tweed suit was very shabby, and Jon noticed with surprise that he was wearing brown boots.

They looked at the map together and Jon pointed out exactly where they were, for the map showed the loop of the railway line, the station and the lighthouse. It also showed the other railway running north to Lydd, but it did not mark the bird sanctuary. The stranger tried to adjust his spectacles and peered at the map.

"Just here," he said, "by this other railway line, is marked 'school.' That is surely very strange, is it not? Why a school in this lonely spot?"

The friendly engine-driver explained that this was a fairly modern house which had been used as a small boarding-school before the war.

"But I hear most of the roof has gone now and 'tis really a ruin. They had a fly-bomb nearby in the war, and the troops used it, o' course... You can see it from here quite plain... This bird place you spoke sir, is way beyond the old track over to the left. I'm told that there be a wonderful lot of birds round here. I see plenty on my trips across the Marsh."

"Thank you very much. Most helpful, I'm sure, shall certainly walk over to the left and observe some wild life. I shall secrete myself somewhere and use my glasses to good effect, I hope. Thank you again... Good day."

Jon and the driver laughed at each other as the little man trudged off across the shingle. "Rum old cove," the latter said, "but we see some oddities round here."

"Thanks very much," Jon said. "I'll come back and see you start. We live in Rye, so we can't come back with you. I'd better see if I can find my friends," and he strolled back to the cafe, which was now packed to the doors.

Penny and Arlette had gone, and when he glanced over to the lighthouse he could still see Wilson's empty car. He glanced at his watch and, realizing that there was still half an hour before the train would leave, he wandered off towards the other deserted platform of the normal gauge railway. It was obvious that this line had not been used for many years - and perhaps then only for goods traffic - for grass and flowers grew between the sleepers and the rails were red with rust. Jon leaned on a gate and looked up the line. He could see Lydd's church tower and line of trees against the skyline and then, from a different angle and much nearer now, the ruined school.

Idly he took his binoculars from their case and was rather surprised to see the grey-green figure of the little naturalist going, not in the direction of the bird sanctuary, but towards the derelict building of the school. This seemed an odd place from which to study bird life, and for a moment Jon wondered whether he should wander off in that direction himself when he heard a wild cry from behind him and turned to see Penny and Arlette waving to him from the lighthouse.

"We saw you talking to the engine-driver, of course," Penny said when they met. "We've been to the sea again. There was nobody there - not even the elusive Mr. Wilson - and the water looks very deep and cold. This is a very peculiar place, and we think we'd like to go home now."

"All right," Jon agreed, "but I'd like to see the train go out first. Come back to the station."

They wandered round the lighthouse and big foghorn for ten minutes before going back to the station.

Many of the passengers who had not been farther than the cafe were chatting on the platform or had already taken their places behind *Hurricane*, which was hissing gently by the signal-box, surrounded by an admiring crowd. They were amused to see that an enterprising photographer, who

probably travelled in the train, was taking pictures of willing clients who posed leaning against the cab of the locomotive.

When Arlette realized what was happening she insisted upon being taken, too.

"But of course I must have the souvenir. It is for my parents. If I do not show them a picture it will be difficult for them to understand that this place is real... You, Penny, will be in the picture, and Jon also... I do not go alone."

"It's nearly time for the train to go," Jon explained. "Go by yourself, Arlette, but be quick. It will take him longer if we all come."

While Arlette was pushing forward through the little crowd round the engine Penny turned to her cousin and said, "She is rather fun, Jon. I'm glad she came back with us after all. This afternoon has been jolly hard work all the same... Look! Here are some of the photographs which this man has taken. Let's see who looks the funniest."

The post card enlargements were displayed in a glass case fixed to the wall of the cafe and Jon, after a backward glance at Arlette, who was now posing happily with the friendly engine-driver, followed Penny down the platform. Before he reached her, however, she turned round and almost shouting with excitement rushed back to him and grabbed his arm.

"Come, Jon! Quickly! Look! Who's this?"

The photograph at which she was pointing with a shaking finger showed a particularly fatuous-looking couple leaning against an engine.

"Not the two in front, you idiot! Look at the big woman walking up the platform in the background... It's Miss Ballinger! Of course it is! She's looking just as we saw her in the car at Folkestone."

"You're right, Newpenny. She's smarter and better dressed than she used to be, but the glasses are the same, and so is her ridiculous shape... This is all I very peculiar, Penny. What was she doing here, I wonder?"

Before his cousin could answer, *Hurricane* gave a shrill blast on his whistle, and as Arlette came running back triumphantly and the passengers were scrambling into their seats Jon saw the little bird-watcher come hurrying along the platform looking very hot and worried.

Much to the girls' surprise, Jon smiled at the odd little man and said, "Only just in time, sir. Did you see anything interesting? Any particular birds, I mean?"

The naturalist turned with his hand on the carriage door.

"Oyster catchers, my boy," he panted. "Most interesting and instructive, and I only wish I had had more time there. I must certainly come again. This place is of the greatest interest to a naturalist... Good evening, my boy," and then, as he opened the door and stooped to get into the compartment, the leather case of his binoculars, which seemed unusually heavy considering that the glasses themselves were hanging loose over the other shoulder, slipped and fell to the platform.

Politely, Jon stepped forward to pick it up, but the man pushed him rudely aside and grabbed the case and tucked it under his arm. And as he did this there was such a change in the expression on his face that Penny, who had also been smiling politely, stepped back in surprise.

The whistle shrilled again, the engine-driver turned and waved cheerfully to Jon, a plume of steam and smoke puffed up from *Hurricane's* squat little smoke-stack and the train moved off with Jon, Penny and Arlette still standing on the platform.

"I 'ave to go to 'Ythe or to a place called Dymchurch to see the picture," Arlette was explaining. "... Tomorrow, the man say... It will be fun..."

Penny turned and smiled at her vaguely while Jon still stood and watched the train pulling round the big curve. He was looking very worried as Penny said:

"Who was the funny little man, Jon? You seemed to know him."

"I don't know his name. He spoke to me when the train came in and you were in the cafe. He asked the way to the bird sanctuary, but he didn't go there..."

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the girls with rather a forced smile. "Oh, well, it's no business of mine, I suppose. Shall we go? No sign of Wilson?"

Penny shook her red head.

"No, I don't think so. What's worrying you, Jon? What's the little man done?"

"I don't know... Will you two girls wait here for me for about twenty minutes and see if Wilson returns? I'm awfully sorry, but the truth is that I want to explore that ruined school up there by the railway line. I shan't be long."

"Oh, no," Penny said. "You've got something on your mind, Jon, and if you're going to stroll up there we're coming with you. If you're visiting empty houses three are much better than one... Come on, Arlette. It's difficult to explain to you, but Jon wants to look at a ruin. I do hope you don't mind the crazy things we do, but I s'pose you'll get used to us in time. Are you too tired?"

"Oh, no! It is the new air that makes me - I do not know the English for it - so much."

Jon did not know the French for "yawn" either, but Arlette's accompanying action was more vivid than a word in any language, and when they had all three laughed together some of the tension of the last few minutes disappeared.

Penny prodded her cousin in the back.

"Come on, Jon. Lead the way. I suppose we can walk along the old railway line and as we go you can tell us why."

"I'm puzzled and curious, that's all. That man with the field-glasses asked me about birds and had a look at my map when I was talking to the engine-driver. This house up here is marked on the map as 'school,' and the driver told us that it had been used by troops and hit by a bomb and hadn't been lived in for ages, although it was a boarding-school before the war... I happened to see the bird-watching man through my glasses go straight up to this place. He didn't go anywhere near the bird sanctuary, and I've got a sort of notion that he doesn't know a great deal about birds. He was quick to say that he'd seen oyster catchers, but I know that he wouldn't be likely to see them from where was... Anyway, it's not the breeding season, and I *don't* know enough about it to be certain, but somehow I don't believe him, and I'd like to know why he was so interested in this house..."

They had reached the old railway line now and Jon, with his long legs, found it simple enough to stride between the rails from one wooden sleeper to the next. Penny did not find it so easy and said so, while Arlette's face showed nothing but pained resignation.

It was a beautiful evening. The fresh wind had dropped to a gentle breeze which set the sea poppies, growing among the shingle, nodding gently. The white band on the lighthouse behind them glowed in the rosy light of the westering sun, and although they were only a few hundred yards now from the station and the other buildings, there was no other human being in sight. Even their voices seemed strange and loud, and Penny found herself speaking in an unnatural whisper as she said, "I don't think I should have liked going to school here, Jon, but it's quite a modern building and doesn't look very damaged."

"If you look through the glasses you can see that lots of tiles are off and most of the windows broken. I should think there's a big hole in the roof, but outside doesn't look too bad."

"Why do we go 'ere?" Arlette asked with direct and understandable simplicity as Jon turned off the line and squeezed through the wire fence to a track leading direct to the ruined house.

Nobody answered her and she shrugged in despair as she followed her crazy English friends across a stony wilderness which had once been an

attempt at a garden to the porch from which the front door was missing.

Jon paused on the threshold and held up his hand. The two girls stood still behind him. All was very quiet. Just the sound of the breeze singing in the telegraph wires by the railway and sighing through the broken roof above them.

"Is anyone there?" Penny called urgently with a catch in her voice.

No answer.

As Jon stepped forward into the empty house he felt Penny's fingers on his wrist. There was a sharp sound as his feet scuffled through a pile of rubble and rubbish on the floor, and then he turned into the first room on the right. Under the window at the far end was a raised platform almost buried under another pile of rubbish.

Penny was so close behind him that he could hear her breathing and her nails were biting into the tender flesh of his wrist. He turned to her to say something about this being a schoolroom when he realized that Arlette was no longer with them.

"Where's Arlette-----?" he began, and his voice boomed round the empty house and then was cut short by a long scream of fear.

Penny dashed back to the open door. "Arlette! Where are you? What is it?"

The French girl was at the far end of the hall leaning against the wall. At the sound of Penny's voice she screamed again, and pointed into the doorway of a room they could not see. Jon pushed past his cousin and ran to her.

"Look!" Arlette whispered with a sob in her throat.

"Oh! Jonathan! Look! I find 'im like that."

Just inside the derelict room a man was lying face downwards sprawled across the dirty floor.

3. The First Grasshopper

Jon felt a sudden stab of fear as he stared down at the man on the floor. What was it, he wondered in that second before he moved, that had suggested that they should come to this eerie ruin. Was it merely because he had seen the doubtful bird watcher come here or was it something - some sort of warning - which he would never be able to explain? And as he stood there, almost afraid to move for fear of what he might find, he felt again the comforting touch of Penny's fingers on his own and heard her say, "It's all right, Jon. He's alive. I've just seen him move. I think it's Wilson."

He noticed how white she was and that her lips were quivering. Giving her a shaky smile, he stepped into the room, went down on his knees and put an arm round the shoulders of the man, who groaned as he tried to sit up.

It was Wilson.

His face was pale and streaked with dirt and his clothes filthy. Struggling to his knees, he put his hand ruefully to a big bump on the back of his head. There was blood on his fingers when he brought them away.

For a long minute they stared at each other in silence - Penny still close to Jon, Arlette just behind them and Wilson now squatting rather ludicrously on the floor.

"I've seen you all before somewhere," he mumbled. "Did one of you hit me on the back of the head? Something did."

Arlette pushed past Penny and went down on her knees beside him in the dust.

"Are you much hurt? What would you like? Is it the hospital?"

Wilson looked at her with amused interest.

"Now where *have* I seen you before? Surely it wasn't long ago? Or are you a beautiful dream?"

Penny sniffed with disgust and the tension was broken.

"Don't be so silly, Mr. Wilson. You know quite well who we are and that we are living at the *Gay Dolphin* at Rye. You were talking to us all before lunch to-day, and so far as I remember you were rather rude to us-----"

"Never mind about that," Jon interrupted as Arlette got up. "Are you sure you're all right now, Mr. Wilson, and do you know what hit you on the head? It's a nasty bump."

"Of course," Wilson managed to smile, "I remember you now. The red-haired spitfire and the charming Arlette. How wonderful that you are all reality and not a dream... Thank you, Jon - I'm still a little wobbly at the knees."

With Jon's help he got up, leaned against the wall and felt in his pocket for a cigarette. Then, "The bump on the back of my head isn't a dream," he said, "so if one of you didn't hit me, who did? What are you all doing here, anyway? This place is miles away from Rye, and I came in the car. You're not following me around, are you?"

"Certainly we're not," Penny flashed. "You flatter yourself, Mr. Wilson, if you think we've got nothing better to do than to follow you round... I should think you ought to be very grateful that we did happen to find you... No, please don't interrupt me. I've something else to say... Be quiet, Jon. I was going to say that if prowling about an empty house is part of the story you want for your paper, I wouldn't write a word of it if I were you."

Wilson smiled at her.

"Of course I'm glad you happened to be about, Redhead," he said. "I wish I knew why you don't like me and why I shouldn't write about this place - that is if it was anything to do with my story."

Penny did not attempt to answer the first question.

"What I meant about your story was that it seems silly to try and explain that you were just out for an innocent stroll by yourself at Dungeness and

you happened to see a deserted war-damaged house and just strolled in and got hit on the head by an invisible man."

Penny was rather pink as she said all this, but she did join in the laughter which followed.

"I dare not laugh like that again," he gasped. "It hurts too much... I should like a drink of something, and I dare say you would, too... Shall we all go to that cafe by the little station? It's a good place. I've tried it."

"So have we," Penny said coldly. "And why should we meet there? We've met now. Here we all are happy and cosy together."

"Stop bickering, Penny," Jon snapped. "I think this is serious... Listen, Mr. Wilson. I think we both know that something rather peculiar is happening round here. We did not follow you to Dungeness and had not the remotest idea you were here until we noticed your empty car by the lighthouse. We've never been here before, but it wasn't altogether by chance that we walked over just now to explore this place and perhaps it's lucky that we did - lucky for you, I mean... Now, we don't want to interfere in anybody's business, but you asked us a lot of questions this morning and then were rather inclined to snub us, and that's not the sort of thing anybody likes. You can treat us as children if you wish, and we'll walk out of here, get on our bikes and go back to Rye. On the other hand, it's only fair to say that I think I know who hit you on the head and that it's because I was suspicious of the person concerned that I came over here. I tried to persuade the girls to wait back there for me, but they would come, and here we are and we don't like being treated so casually. If you don't want our help say so and we'll go. If you do, then you'll have to trust us and tell us more than you have already - I mean you'll have to do more than just ask questions."

This was almost the longest speech which Jon had ever made, and when he had finished he took off his spectacles and polished them violently. Penny looked at him with admiration, while Arlette, who had not followed very much of it, but was completely thrilled by the whole dramatic situation, almost applauded.

"That was well said, Jonathan," Wilson said at last "Very well said. Thank you, and I'm sorry if I've seemed a little off hand with you all. The truth is that I have got a very big job to do - maybe it's bigger than I imagined - and that I'm worried about making a success of it. Now I've been fooled and have a bad headache into the bargain... I should like your help very much indeed. I mean that, and if you've got time I'd like to talk to you all in a few minutes. Meanwhile, Jon, I wonder if you would help me to explore this place while the girls wait outside?... I always had a weakness for redheads and French brunettes, and I think I'd be happier if they were out in the sunshine. I'm not very keen on this place."

"Neither are we," Penny said, "but I think we'll all stick together if you don't mind. It's nice and comforting to know that you want to look after us, but if we went back ourselves now I should feel there was somebody watching us all the time from these horrible empty windows... Arlette, darling, I am so sorry if I speak too fast, but you do understand what's happening, don't you? It is rude of us not to speak in French, I know, and you'll have to ask Jon to explain everything presently... You're shivering, Arlette. Are you cold?"

"No! no! I have the great excitement. I like all this ver' much."

Wilson smiled at her reassuringly.

"If there is anybody else in this house they know all about us by now, but I would like to look into every room... I'll go first, you girls next and Jon in the rear."

There was not very much to see. The back of the house was far more badly damaged than the front and two outside walls of the big kitchens had collapsed. They managed to reach the top floor by helping each other across a gap in the broken staircase. Upstairs, although the walls between the bedrooms and dormitories were still standing, the roof and floors were in very bad condition.

"It doesn't look as if anyone had been here for a long time, does it?" Jon said. "No signs of anyone camping out or anything like that."

Wilson looked at him shrewdly.

"Why should they, Jon? A ruin like this at the end of the world?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just wondered."

"You can see a long way from these windows," Penny remarked. "I can see the sea now and all along the coast and Jon's precious little railway line. This was certainly an odd place to build a school... But it's getting late, and I think we ought to go."

The wind was rising as the sun went down and they shivered as they turned from the broken window and made for the landing. Through the gaps in the roof and round the empty rooms the wind whined and whistled and swirled the dust which their feet raised from the rubble into little clouds which made them cough.

Downstairs again, it was Penny who said: "The only room we've not searched properly is the one where we found you. Let's have a look at that before we go."

She stepped in and looked round, but there was nothing unusual about it except that it was smaller and darker than the others on this floor.

"I should think this was the headmaster's or the headmistress's study," she said. "Whatever it was, I don't like it. It's a hateful place. I should think it has bats in it whenever it gets dusk... Just about here," she went on as she stepped forward, "I should think he - or she - had his desk-----" and with these words she stumbled and fell with a cry of surprise.

Jon ran forward and saw that her right foot had disappeared through a hole in the floor.

"The floorboard was loose," she gasped as she took his hand, "but I think I'm all right."

She got up and rubbed her ankle and then they all stooped to see that a portion of boarding, about fifteen inches long, had been sawn through so that it could be lifted out of position. The cavity underneath was empty except for dirt and scraps of mortar.



"IT'S LIKE A KID'S DRAWING," SAID JON. "IT REMINDS ME
OF SOMETHING, BUT I CAN'T THINK WHAT."

"But it could be used to hide something," Jon murmured as he twisted the piece of timber between his fingers. "It looks to me as if it's been sawn through recently. The edge is quite clean - and look here, Mr. Wilson! There are some white chalk-marks on it! What do you think they mean? It's like a kid's drawing."

He took the wood over to the light, and they all crowded round him.

"It reminds me of something, but I can't think what," he went on.

"It might be a flea. Or a grasshopper, maybe," Wilson suggested, "but I don't think it means anything. I've no doubt that children - really young children, I mean - come in here sometimes, and I dare say there are drawings on the walls if we like to look for them."

Jon dropped the piece of wood, and as it clattered to the floor he said, "A grasshopper? That's odd. We were only talking about grasshoppers in Paris the day before yesterday... Come on. Let's go. I'm tired of this place."

None of them had much to say as they trudged back to the lighthouse along the old railway line. The girls were very tired, Jon was looking particularly glum, while Wilson, whose head was still aching badly, kept glancing from one to the other of them as if trying to make up his mind to speak. It was an awkward fifteen minutes, and not until they were standing beside Wilson's car did he say:

"That's that! Have I said thank you?"

"Oh, yes," Penny agreed. "You did, thank you. You also said that you were going to talk to us, but I really think we ought to get back now."

"I hoped you'd come over to the cafe and have a cup of tea with me, but I could give you two girls a lift home to the *Dolphin* and tie your bicycles on the back of the car, but I don't suppose I can fit in Jon as well. We've got plenty to say to each other and I'm very anxious to know what's on Jon's

mind - particularly if he can give me an idea about the cause of this bump on my head... What do you suggest, Jonathan?"

"I'd be glad if you would take the girls home, Mr. Wilson. If you can't manage the bikes perhaps you could bring us over to-morrow and collect them. I don't mind cycling. I shall be home in an hour and a half... Will you take Penny and Arlette, please? And you'll explain to Mother that I'm on my way, won't you, Penny?"

Penny opened her mouth to protest, but Jon shook his head at her, while Arlette, realizing that she would not have to mount the accursed bicycle again, was all smiles.

"Very well, Jonathan," Wilson agreed. "If the girls don't mind a squash we'll do that and manage the bikes somehow. But when shall we talk?"

"Tell the girls the number of your room and I'll come for you about eleven to-night. We've got a secret room of our own in the *Dolphin* and we can talk there. If you'll stop treating us like children and tell us what you've come down here to discover, I'll tell you about the chap who must have hit you on the head, and we'll do all we can to help you. We know Rye inside out, and although we don't know the Marsh so well, I'm sure that there's lots we could do. We feel certain that you're on to something exciting, and we've had some adventures together down here, as I suspect you know... Did you ever hear of the *Gay Dolphin* treasure?... I thought you would have done. It was in the papers. Anyway, I've got the feeling, because of several things that have happened to us in the last few days, that we're on the edge of another adventure. And don't be misled or put off by this little redhead, Mr. Wilson. She's not nearly so childish as she looks and is, indeed, full of guile and low cunning. And though our charming friend Arlette imagines we're crazy, I can think of lots of ways in which she'll be useful."

Wilson looked pensively at the two girls and then gave Penny a friendly smile.

"It's true that women with their superior guile are sometimes useful," he said, "and if you'll all promise me faithfully to keep my secret and not to speak to anyone about this, we'll be a partnership. I'll look forward to seeing

you all to-night, and I'm sorry you've got to cycle, Jon, but I expect they'll keep dinner for you."

Penny looked doubtfully at her cousin and said, "I really will cycle with you if you like, Jon," but he knew that she hated the idea, and so, with a cheerful wave, set out on his own. The car, with two bicycles wobbling on the open boot at the back, passed him before he reached Lydd, and he was very thankful when he got to Rye just as the street lamps were lighting up. Penny and Arlette were waiting at the end of Trader's Street to meet him as he pushed his cycle up the hill, and both were looking so fresh and nice that for once he almost felt ashamed of his own untidy appearance.

"We've had our dinner, Jon. I knew you wouldn't mind, and I explained to Auntie, who didn't seem very keen to be kept waiting any longer. We thought you'd like a bath, and then I've got a tray of cold food for you ready to take up to our room afterwards. We'll have to get Wilson up as soon as you're ready, 'cos it will be impossible for Arlette or me to stay awake much longer."

"There's nobody like you, Penny," Jon replied as his shoes dragged with weariness on the cobbles. "That's a wonderful idea. See if you can find Wilson and bring him up in an hour's time," and he never noticed how she turned her face away so that he should not see how pleased she was at what he had said.

And so, after Jon had given Penny the key of the room, made his peace with his mother and soaked in a hot bath for an hour, he put on a sweater, slacks and a dressing-gown and went upstairs. The girls were there already, a wood fire was flickering in the big hearth and a loaded tray was on the table.

"I'll try to find Wilson now," Penny said. "We don't want to waste time, and I know from long experience that you can talk while you eat. He wasn't in the lounge when I looked in, and I remembered that he was going out with Fred, and you never know what will happen when two men go out together like that."

But Wilson had returned and was with them five minutes later.

"It's a very great honour and privilege for you to be here," Penny was saying as she led him up the narrow little staircase. "We'd never have asked you if we didn't trust you, and now you've got to come clean, as they say on the films... Mind your head, as the doorway is rather low... Here we are... Don't you think Arlette looks nice this evening? And that's Jon over there, eating. You've not asked after him yet, you know."

She switched on the electric light, which had only just been installed up here at the top of the house, and Wilson looked round him in amazement.

"Is it not wonderful, Monsieur?" Arlette laughed. "I like this place ver', ver' much. It makes the excitement."

"Penny is right," Wilson agreed. "It seems to suit you up here, Arlette... Hullo, Jon. Hope you're not too tired. This certainly is a wonderful place, and I know I'm lucky to be admitted... What are you doing, Penny?"

"Locking you in. You can't get out now until you've told us the truth. I've got to give Jon the key because it's too cold and uncomfortable to put inside my frock. Are you a willing prisoner?"

"I think so. May I sit down to tell my story?"

They pulled their chairs up to the fire and while Jon was finishing his dinner Wilson filled and lit his pipe. Penny, with one leg tucked under her, sat gazing into the comforting flames, while Arlette leaned forward with her chin on her hands and watched Wilson with her lovely dark eyes as he began to speak .

"I suppose you know all about the smugglers of Romney Marsh in days gone by, and I expect you've read plenty of stories about them. I think there is truth in all these yarns, but I don't suppose I can tell you much about what used to happen in Rye itself, and indeed in this very hotel and room, that you don't already know..."

"You know there is a passage behind this panelling leading down to a tunnel under Trader's Passage, don't you, Mr. Wilson?" Penny said proudly, and when he nodded she added, "I expect that traitor, Fred Vasson, told you."

"In the old days, of course," Wilson went on, "it was brandy, lace and wines which were smuggled in from France and the wool of the Romney Marsh sheep which went out. I was reading myself the other day that no part of England was so continually active in smuggling through the centuries as this little stretch of coast between Hastings and Hythe. This is easy to understand, of course, because it is very thinly populated, handy for landing goods and once the bales were safely on the back of the pack-ponies it was convenient country for evading pursuit. I'm told that in autumn and winter the mist lies a few feet thick over all the Marsh, and although I've never seen it, I can imagine that the Marshmen who would know every track and every dyke would be able to guide their ponies for many miles without even being seen by the watching Redcoats. No stranger would have a chance in these parts, and I've no doubt that many a mother's son trying to do his duty as a Preventive Officer or a dragoon finished his young life at the bottom of one of the dykes which cross the Marsh. I was thinking to-day as I drove these girls home that I wouldn't care to be out on the Marsh on a winter's night - not even in a car.

"There was a lot of money to be made out of smuggling, and even when a few of the 'owlers,' as they were called, were caught it was difficult to find a local magistrate who would convict them, for it was said, with some truth, I believe, that the magistrate who sat on the bench by day and the parson in his pulpit on Sunday rode with the smugglers at night... Another thing I was reading was that the big, lonely churches on the Marsh - and if you look carefully you will see that they are all far too big for the size of the villages they are supposed to serve - were often used for storing contraband. There's one quite near to you here at East Guldeford which is an obvious example, for it stands by itself nearly three hundred yards from the road and from the nearest house... And you saw for yourselves to-day at Dungeness how suitable that place is for smuggling and any other secret operation.

"In the war many of those bungalows were used to hide A.A. guns and the little railway played a heroic part in our defence, for one of the locomotives and some rolling stock were armoured and patrolled the lonely stretch of coast between Romney and Dungeness. It was always considered likely that the Germans might try a landing on the Marsh, and I believe that part of it between here and Winchelsea was actually flooded as a precaution.

Between Dungeness and Greatstone was run Pluto, or Pipe Line Under the Ocean, through which petrol was pumped to our troops in France after D Day."

Jon pushed back his tray, stretched out his tired legs towards the fire and smiled sleepily at the girls.

"Do you understand, Arlette? I promise you that he's telling a very good story in English. If he's too difficult for you I'll try in French to-morrow, but too tired to translate now."

"Thank you, Jon. I understand a lot. Monsieur Wilson, 'e talk a little like a book."

"Please tell us what you are doing now," Penny pleaded, "and then Jon will tell you what we've found out. But you'll have to be quick, 'cos we're all so sleepy."

Wilson lit another match for his pipe.

"I'm trusting you with a lot," he went on seriously, "but I believe that you realize that and won't abuse the trust. We find out things in newspaper offices it's our job to do so, and just now we are on to something very big indeed, and I've been sent down here to see what I can discover. It's believed that this coast is being used again for smuggling - not brandy or lace, but probably jewellery and possibly expensive watches which are being smuggled in to avoid the payment of purchase tax. It's possible that other parts of the coast are being used as well, and I think that the marshes on the Essex coast are as likely as here, but it's my job to get a story as soon as possible. Of course, the police and the coastguards and the Customs are all on to this, and fairly soon I shall have to work with them, but none of these people really care about us newspaper chaps, and I want something before every other paper gets it... That's the fun of newspaper work, Jon! Getting the story first, and I think I told you that this is a big chance for me..."

"Now, if you're as sensible as you say you are, you three may be able to help me, and I really shall be glad of and grateful for such help. You'll be

able to go where many grown-ups couldn't go without being suspected, and I think we can soon invent a system of keeping in touch, because I'm not at all sure that I ought not to be centred the other side of Dungeness. Rye may be too far to the west... Now tell me who hit me on the head, Jon. It's still very sore, and I'm very annoyed about it. I'd like to catch up with that gentleman - if it was a man."

So Jon told him about the mysterious bird-watcher at Dungeness station and of his interest in the map.

"And come to think of it, I did notice that he was wearing boots with crepe rubber soles, and I'm fairly sure - but not certain - that he wasn't really interested in birds, but wanted to get to the ruined school as soon as possible. Now that I look back on it, I think he *knew* about the school, but because he hadn't got very long he asked me and the engine-driver to confirm that it was the modern-looking building by the other railway line... But you haven't told us what you were doing there, Mr. Wilson."

"Me? Oh, I was just exploring. I told you that I've been reading up this coast, and it was obvious that Dungeness had possibilities. I came over directly after lunch and prowled about for a long time. I found a gloomy fisherman who talked a bit and that decent woman in the cafe told me some more. I forget which of them mentioned the school, but it seemed odd to have built such a place in a shingle desert, so I thought I'd have a look round. I didn't go in the front door, but wandered away from the railway line where the bird sanctuary must be and spent some time there, for that part of the coastline is lonelier and wilder even than the stretch towards Littlestone and it's not as level. There must be any number of hiding-places there. Anyway, I approached the house from the other side, and certainly didn't try to hide the fact that I was there, and I suppose your tweedy friend had already arrived and hid when he heard me coming. I really forget now whether I looked in all the downstairs rooms. What do you think he hit me with?"

"I should think it was his binoculars, unless he picked up a stone or something in the house. When we saw him on the platform later his binoculars were hanging over one shoulder and their leather case, which I'm certain had got something heavy packed in it, was over the other. He

dropped the case, and when I went to pick it up for him he snarled at me and grabbed it himself. That's when I got suspicious and thought that I'd stroll over to the school. There was something very odd about him then, and I felt - I think the girls did, too, because they were there - that before he had been *acting*, if you can understand what I mean."

Wilson nodded. "I understand, Jon. Go on."

"Well, that's about all that happened, but if you'd like to know, I think that something had been hidden in that place and that Bird Watcher had come to fetch it. Perhaps we've got on the trail of your smugglers without realizing it. Perhaps something was hidden in that hole in the floor and you were knocked out because you were hanging about the one room he hadn't searched and he'd got very little time if he wanted to get back on the train? If he *did* pick up something out of that hole, then it's my guess he hid it in the binocular case... What do you think?"

"I think you're very shrewd," Wilson said as he knocked out the ashes of his pipe. "It's a ridiculous story really, but it's the sort of simple way in which clever rogues work. I dare say the police are looking for helicopters and fast speed-boats. I think we're on to something, and you will all promise not to talk about this to *anyone*, won't you?"

"Not even to Fred?" Penny said. "You've been talking to him."

"Fred? Oh, that nice porter. No, I wouldn't even talk to him."

"Don't worry," Penny went on. "We won't give this away, and I think we've got something else very important to tell you. Jon, shall I tell him about Slinky and Ballinger?" and when he nodded approval she told again the outline of their first meeting with these two and, in more detail, of their last.

"We don't know where they are now, Mr. Wilson," she finished rather breathlessly. "They may even be miles and miles away and nothing whatever to do with this other business, but we're fairly sure that they're up to no good, and we've got proof that the woman has been to Dungeness recently."

Wilson's pipe clattered to the floor.

"What proof?"

We've seen her photograph. She didn't know she was being taken, but she's in the background of a picture of a soppy couple taken by the engine on Dungeness station. The photograph is in a glass case with others on the wall. Jon saw it, too."

"True enough," her cousin confirmed. "No doubt as to who it is."

"So I s'pose the first thing for us to do," Penny went on, "is to find Johns bird-watcher somehow. That's something we could do."

"He said something about coming from Hythe," Jon murmured. "He may have been telling the truth... And the other important thing, of course, is to find how the smuggled goods are being brought ashore, and also if Ballinger and Slinky have anything to do with Bird Watcher... We want a lot of people on this job, don't we?"

Penny jumped from her chair and put her hands on Jon's shoulders.

"Of course we do! We want some of the Lone Piners. We want David and the twins, who know Ballinger and Slinky of old, and any of the others who can come."

Wilson got up, too. He was looking really shocked.

"You don't mean to tell me that there are more like you and that you're going to get them down here and let them into this secret?"

"We do," Penny said. "And there's no need to be so snooty about it. These others are our friends, and they're used to adventures, and helped us to find the *Dolphin's* treasure. I promise that we won't let you down. I promise you faithfully, Mr. Wilson - I say, do you mind if we all call you James or Jimmy? I looked you up in the hotel register, and as you're not so very much older than us and as we're all in this together, 'Mr Wilson' seems rather silly, doesn't it? Do you mind? We are friends, aren't we?"

"Yes, Penny. I think we're friends now and I'd like you to call me James. I detest Jimmy. James is a nice old-fashioned, honest name and it's also more dignified. So let it be James... Now that we're partners we must keep in touch, but not in the hotel. I promise you that I'll let you know the moment I want you to do something definite, but we must not fall over each other's feet and do the same thing... I think your first job will be the Bird-Watcher, but if you do see him again by chance - or either of your other two unpleasant friends - let me know at once. If I'm not in the hotel - and I think I'll be out a lot the next day or two - leave a note for me at the desk. Of course, I don't know how you're going to manage, but I should imagine that you can't all keep disappearing all the time. You've promised not to tell Mrs. Warrender or anyone else, so it may be difficult for you to do everything at once... And if these other young friends do turn up, please don't take any action without telling me first."

"That's all right," Jon said. "We know how you feel, but I promise you we won't let you down. It's not always easy for us to do everything we want to do just when we want to do it. Some grown-ups aren't very reasonable, but we'll keep in touch. You can trust us."

"I believe I can," Wilson smiled. "Good night all, and thank you very much for your hospitality. I'm going to take three aspirins now and go to bed. I expect we'll meet at breakfast and I'll look at you all very solemnly over the top of my paper."

"Good night, James," Penny said wickedly. "You're going to be very glad that you came to this hotel. Give me the key, Jon, and we'll let the prisoner go."

4. The Bogus Bird-Watcher

Two mornings after the adventure in the ruined school Jon, for once, woke early. The wind, bringing with it the smell of salt and tar which he loved, was rustling the curtains about his open window, and when he sat up in bed he could see a haze over the Marsh that was the forecast of another lovely day.

He put on his glasses and looked at his watch. Half-past seven, so there was no real need for him to get up for three-quarters of an hour. He wondered whether there was anything particular he could do if he did get up, decided that there was not and then settled back on his pillow and began to think about yesterday and what might happen to-day.

Yesterday had not really been satisfactory. They had all been very tired and after a late breakfast had tried to find Wilson, without success. Fred had told them that he had gone out early in his car without leaving any message. This had annoyed Penny and after a conference they had decided to ask Mrs. Warrender if they could invite David Morton, the twins and, if possible, Petronella Sterling to stay for a week at the *Dolphin*. While it was true that his mother had not viewed this prospect with much enthusiasm, she had at last agreed, as there was plenty of room in the hotel; but only on the condition that Arlette was not neglected. And so another urgent telegram had conquered the miles between the Sussex coast and the Shropshire hills, and almost as soon as it had gone Mrs. Warrender had decided to telephone Mrs. Morton at Witchend and confirm the invitation. Neither Jon nor Penny had heard this conversation and all they knew was that it was not likely that Peter could come, but that David and the twins would be glad to do so and that David would write immediately.

Then Mrs. Warrender had insisted upon taking Penny and Arlette out for the morning, after telling Jon that he was to be in for lunch and to take the girls bathing at Camber in the afternoon.

Jon reflected here that orders were orders and that, as James Wilson had reminded them, it was much more difficult for them to do what they wanted

to do because they were not grown-up. All the same they had enjoyed the bathe very much. The sands of Camber were white and hot to the touch and the water was almost as warm. Arlette had surprised them by the excellence of her swimming and they had enjoyed their picnic tea afterwards, while sun-bathing and looking occasionally at Dungeness in the distance and wondering whether Wilson was there again and whether he had called in some other allies. He was still missing after dinner but when Penny enquired at the Reception Desk she was told that Mr. Wilson had not given up his room for good. When at last they were free to do what they wanted to do, Arlette had been shown the secret passage and been taken down to the very spot where Penny had found the *Dolphin's* treasure.

Now here was another day beginning. Jon hoped most sincerely that they would be able to have a talk with Wilson and that David's letter would come by the first post. He realized it was possible David had not seen very much of his home or his mother this summer and that perhaps Penny and he had not been very reasonable in suggesting that David and the twins should come at such short notice. Yet there was no doubt about Miss Ballinger and Grandon being together again, and very little doubt that there was an adventure in the offing. It was true, too, that his mother was a wonderful and very understanding person and did not interfere with them much, though she was being rather fussy about Arlette.

Jon wondered about Arlette. Was she going to be a complication? He liked her a lot, but there was something in what Penny had said about her not fitting in with the others. And yet she tried hard to understand English ways and seemed to be enjoying everything, except his mother's bicycle and Dungeness. Certainly she had enjoyed the secret passage - "ver', ver' much." She was rather excitable, though, and it would certainly be hard on her if David and the twins did not like her. But they would have to like her. They had all got to make it work, and with a sigh of relief he sat up in bed with the thought that David ought to be here to-day and that it would be wonderful to have the company of a boy of his own age instead of two temperamental girls. He needed David's support!

As for the twins, they would be invaluable in searching for the Ballinger if necessary. They would, without doubt, be cheeky and irritating, but they

would never be dull.

He got out of bed, stretched and leaned out of the window.

"Morning, Fred," he called to Vasson, who was busy in the front with a broom. "Has the post come and is Mr. Wilson's car in the garage?"

"Mornin', Mister Jonathan. Post has come and Mr. Wilson's car be in the right place."

"I'll be down in a sec. I'm expecting an important letter from David Morton. You remember him, don't you?"

Fred looked up suspiciously.

"Be they coming here again?... And those twins and the liddle dog?"

"They be, Fred. I think they be. All of 'em, although I didn't mention the dog to Mother. I'm coming down."

When he crossed the lounge towards the office a few minutes later he saw the back of a red head showing above the top of a big arm-chair. He was wearing sandals, which made no sound on the thick carpet, so that Penny had no idea that he was there when he came up from behind and looked down at her. She was in dressing-gown and pyjamas and was gazing pensively at a letter which she was twiddling between her fingers.

Jon smiled grimly.

"Haven't you opened it, ducky? What wonderful self-control."

To her credit, Penny barely jumped.

"You are lazy in the mornings, Jon," she said without looking up. "I thought I'd come down and see if there were any letters-----"

"One special letter, you mean. One addressed to me by David."

"Any letters, I said, before you interrupted so rudely, and then, if there were any for you, I was going to bring them up and push them under your door."

"What a little liar you are, Newpenny. You were almost mad with curiosity and you hoped that perhaps David would address his letter to us both, and then you were going to open it first... Pass it over, please."

Penny looked up at him under her lashes.

"You may sit down on the arm of this chair, Jonathan dear, 'cos I've got something very important to say to you... No! Sit down and don't grab. You shall see the letter in a minute... Listen, Jonathan. One day, when you're old enough to be not quite so pleased with yourself, some girl is going to tell you that you're not always as smart as you think you are. I hope it's a girl, anyway. I don't suppose a man would tell you that because all men are conceited... All men except Fred, that is. I think Fred is a pet. Sometimes in term time, when I'm crying into my pillow and remembering the *Dolphin*, who do you imagine I'm thinking of?"

"Me." Jon grinned as he made a grab for the envelope.

"Just Fred," Penny murmured. "I nearly told him so just now, but he was busy sweeping up. He's not conceited, and I'm afraid that men of his type are dying out... Here's the letter. You can look at it if you like. It's addressed to us both, and I was waiting for you because Fred said you were on your way down."

Jon had the grace to look a little shamefaced.

"Sorry, Newpenny. I deserved all that. You open it and read it aloud... Good old David!"

"All right. You're forgiven," and she slit the envelope, pulled out the welcome letter and began to read.

"Dear Jon and Penny,

"It was grand to get your second telegram this morning and very good of Mrs. Warrender to ring up Mother before the wire actually arrived. We were all tickled to death to get your first message about Ballinger and really thought you were pulling our legs. This arrived just as we'd finished up a wonderful adventure over in Jenny's country, (*Lone Pine Five.*) and even now we're in the middle of a long report to you both telling you all about it. Do you really mean to say that you've seen Ballinger *and* Slinky together? Surely they would never be so stupid as to work again in the same district where they were caught before?"

"That's just like David," Penny broke in. "He's so stupidly logical. We know it doesn't make sense for Ballinger and Slinky to behave like this, but they have - all right. I'll go on."

"Anyway, even if you are pulling our legs, we'd like nothing better than to see the *Dolphin* again. By 'we' I mean the twins and me. Peter stayed with us for part of the hols., as you know, but it's been pouring with rain ever since we got up here, and she's gone back to Hatchholt with her father. Since your telegram came we've been over to see her, and, as I suspected, she can't leave Mr. Sterling again now. Jenny can't leave home either because she's due back to school almost at once and Tom has had most of his holiday and has to return to Ingles on Saturday. If this weather goes on, Mother and Father will close up Witchend and come south again in a few days, and so we're doing as you say and starting first thing in the morning - in fact we'll have started before you get this. I'll telephone you from Paddington or Charing Cross just to let you know when we'll be down.

"The twins are crazy as usual, but when you hear the full story of our adventure you'll have to admit that they've been jolly useful. Mackie will be coming too, and I do hope Mrs. Warrender won't mind. Mary won't come without him and Dickie won't come without his twin.

"We still can't believe that you're serious about Ballinger, but it will be super to see you both again, and I've no doubt we shall find something to do. We're not bringing much luggage, but I think it's a good scheme to bring our bikes.

"Peter is awfully upset she can't come. She's never seen the *Dolphin*, but I can tell you that we shall miss her, and she's been wonderful in the adventure we've just finished.

"See you to-morrow, and thanks again.

"Yours,

"David."

"One of the many things I like about David," Penny said pensively as she folded the letter and passed it to Jon, "is that he does know how to stick up for his friends. He'd never let anyone say a word against Peter - so different from Jonathan Warrender, who thinks I was going to open his private letter... Oh, well! I'm thrilled they're coming - specially David, because that will give you more chance to explain everything that's happening to Arlette while I'm getting to know him better... Jon!" and she jumped out of the chair with a look of horror on her face, "Jon! We never told them about Arlette, did we? I wonder if they'll agree that we ought to have told her a bit about us - the Lone Piners, I mean. I think she'll be a surprise to them."

"Not more than the twins will surprise her, Penny. Maybe they'll be good for each other. I wonder what sort of adventure they've had? The only snag about them coming to-day is that one of us will have to be about to meet them. I must get hold of Wilson after breakfast..."

"James is his name! Dear, handsome James. Little does he know how he's going to be utterly surrounded and assisted by Lone Piners... This is going to be fun, Jon! It's going to be wonderful. I feel it in my bones. I'll be down in ten minutes, and although I know I'm very weak I've forgiven you."

Jon found a paper and studied the cricket results and averages until his cousin rejoined him fifteen minutes later. There was no sign of Arlette at their table, where Mrs. Warrender was already busy with her morning post.

"Good morning, children," she greeted them cheerfully. "You neither of you look quite so washed out this morning... You need not wait for Arlette. I shall have to speak to that young lady politely but firmly about punctuality

at breakfast - and this reminds me that I want to speak seriously to both of you about her, and this is as good a chance as I shall get. Have you heard from Witchend, by the way, and who's coming to-day?"

"Yes, I have, Mother. David and the twins will be here this afternoon - and Mackie, too."

"Mackie? Is that one I don't know?"

"Macbeth. Their little black Scottie dog. I'm sure you remember him, Auntie. He's wonderful."

"I hope so," Mrs. Warrender said. "He'll have to behave wonderfully in the hotel to please me... Now about Arlette. I'm pleased for you to have the Mortons - not only because they are your friends, but because I shall always think of Mr. and Mrs. Morton as my friends, too. But I must remind you both again that Arlette is your guest and must be treated as such. She is not only a guest in our family, but in our country too, and you must not neglect her for your other friends. I've no doubt you're up to something between you; but I will not have Arlette just trailing round after you other scallywags and doing what you suggest all the time. She may hate all this cycling and walking, and we've got to give her a good time and try to show her what she wants to see. I shall take her - and you, too, Penny - to London on some day trips very soon. She'll enjoy seeing Hastings, too, and you must take her there... Penny! It's no use looking sulky-----"

"I was *not*, Auntie. I'm never sulky."

"Well, mutinous, shall we say? You must, both of you, make up your minds that Arlette is never to feel out of things, either by what you actually do or by your old friendship with the Mortons. If I see any such signs I shall arrange all your expeditions for you. I expect we should have to work to a time-table... Here she comes!"

Arlette was making her usual dramatic entrance - beautifully dressed and looking quite twenty.

"Good morning to all," she beamed as she sat down. "It is that I am late? *Non!* Good... But you have nearly finished. Perhaps you are early?" She shrugged deliciously and, turning to Jon, said, in what was meant to be a dramatic whisper, "Ze James Wilson. He is not here, no? No! He is in his room. He tell them outside that he want his bill. He got to pack, he say. I 'ear 'im as I come down."

Jon got up.

"Please excuse me, Mother."

"But you've not finished your breakfast, Jon. Do please sit still for a few moments and enjoy your meal like a civilized person."

Jon fidgeted in his chair. He must see Wilson before he left, but because he had promised not to discuss their secret in the hotel he could not very well say more to his mother now. He was beginning to wonder whether Wilson was really playing the game? Why was he leaving so suddenly? Perhaps he had received an important letter which had been sent up to his room?

Mrs. Warrender was speaking again.

"You're not paying attention, Jon. Please pass Arlette the sugar and listen to what I'm saying... You must try to warn Arlette about the Morton twins before they arrive, otherwise they may be rather a shock to her, and please remember that I want her and Penny to come out this afternoon with me. We may go to Hastings or Folkestone. I don't suppose the Mortons will get here until early evening, and I want Arlette to see some shops."

"All right, Mother," Jon agreed rather gloomily. "David is going to ring up from London when he gets to Paddington, but I shouldn't be surprised if they started in the dawn this morning and came in a milk train. I expect the twins have packed themselves into churns... And we'll remember what else you said, I promise."

"And thank you, Auntie darling, for letting us have the Mortons at such short notice," Penny said. "You are a most wonderful and understanding

person, and we do promise you that Arlette is enjoying herself... You are, aren't you, Arlette?"

"I am what, Pennee?"

"Enjoying yourself, Arlette? Having fun with us? You like Rye and the *Dolphin*?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Arlette dropped her spoon and raised her eyes and hands in ecstasy. "Of course, I enjoy ver', ver' much. I am ver', ver' 'appy. I love you all and I love much the excitement."

"That's splendid, then," Mrs. Warrender said hurriedly, feeling perhaps that she had unloosed a torrent. "We're very glad to have you, dear, and we want you to go on enjoying yourself... Oh! and one other thing, Jon... You told me the other day that you'd seen the Ballinger woman and Grandon at Folkestone. I'm wondering whether that has anything to do with your sudden interest in the Mortons. Just remember that those two are out of our lives for ever and that you must mind your own business... Enjoy yourselves this morning."

Jon jumped up to open the door for his mother, and when he came back his face was very red.

"Come out as soon as you can," he gasped. "I must find Wilson."

He dashed out into the yard and found Vasson washing down the familiar two-seater.

"That's right, Mister Jonathan. Mr. Wilson be leaving in a few minutes. I'll be bringing the car out in the front and you'll be seeing him there, no doubt."

Five minutes later the girls (Arlette still munching toast) joined Jon, and they sat together on the wall until Wilson, looking very jaunty with a squashy felt hat on the back of his head, came out into the sunshine just as Fred drove his car out of the yard.

The three regarded him in silence until, rather nervously, he flicked his cigarette end away and said:

"Good morning, all! How are you this morning? Arlette is looking very chic, and I see that Penny remains determined under the circumstances to emphasize the charms of British girlhood."

Penny flushed and slid rather inelegantly off the wall.

"Don't bother to be funny, Mr. Wilson. You don't have to *talk* like a journalist to us. We were looking for you all yesterday. Are you running away from us?"

Wilson frowned at them.

"Not so loud, please... Thank you, Fred. The case in the boot, please, and that will be all, except that I hope to see you again. I like the *Dolphin*..."

Then he came over to the wall and lit another cigarette.

"Try and act in a grown-up way," he said quietly. "I told you that if you're to help me you must learn to be patient and to trust me, too... There's a short note in *The Times* this morning on a question asked in the House of Commons yesterday about smuggling on the south coast. The Minister in question admitted that it was going on and that the position was causing the authorities increased anxiety... This means that things are moving and half Fleet Street will be down here cluttering the place up in about two hours' time. I've got to get busy, and I've an idea that I'm wasting my time in Rye, which is too far west. I'm moving on to Dymchurch or New Romney, as either of these places are better centres for the Marsh... If any other newspaper chaps come poking round here you won't tell them anything, will you? You did promise me that, you know, and, of course, if you hear or see anything else suspicious you'll let me know. I'll ring up sometimes to tell you where I am... Cheerio!"

Before Jon could open his mouth Penny let fly.

"You'll let us know where you are, will you, Mr. Wilson? How very, very kind of you! We can hardly wait to know where you'll be. Anyone, to hear you talk, would think that we'd done nothing to help you already, You seem to have forgotten that you promised we should work together, but if you're jolly well not interested in what we told you the other night, I dare say that some other newspaper would like to know that a man and woman we know to be crooked seem to be working together again. Or maybe the police would like to know? P'raps we've been wrong in not telling them now... How can you possibly watch the whole of the Marsh by yourself? Why, you don't even know the man you allowed to come up behind you and whang you on the head... Don't you worry, Mr. James Knowall Wilson! We shall get on much better without *you* than you will without us. We've got some friends coming this afternoon who are much more experienced than you seem to be in solving a mystery, and two of them are only ten years old! And don't you two men stand there with silly smirks on your faces... Good-bye, Mr. Wilson... Come along, Arlette!"

She grabbed her astonished friend by the hand and flounced - if anyone as dainty as Penny could be said to flounce - into the hotel.

Wilson removed his hat and mopped his forehead.

"How old is she?" he asked Jon. "Nearly sixteen? Really! What a wonderful woman she'll be one day. And she's your cousin? Well! Well! I suppose there is some truth in the red hair theory... Look here, Jonathan. I may have been a little off-hand with you all but I'm not used to chaps of your age. I suppose that some of what she said is true enough and that there are ways in which you could help me... I think the two of us had better have a talk without those girls. Young Penny upsets me! Come out for an hour or so in the car with me. We can talk better without the women."

Jon barely hesitated.

"All right. Let's do that... Fred! Please tell Miss Penny when you see her that I'll be back for lunch and that she's not to worry," and he got into the car beside Wilson.

"Now, Jonathan," the latter said as he guided the car under the old Land Gate and headed for the bridge over the Rother and the road over the Marsh, "what have you got to tell me? I was exploring all the Marsh villages yesterday and spent some time in Hythe as well."

"We couldn't get away and do much yesterday," Jon admitted ruefully. "Mother wanted us for other things and I had to take the girls swimming, but it won't always be like that, and I'm sure that when we get all this organized there will be lots that we can do for you, and in spite of Penny I promise you that we do want to help. We've got three friends coming to-day, and they're very smart... Don't you think the best thing we can do is to split forces, but decide what we're each going to do?"

Wilson nodded and fumbled for his pipe as he stopped the car at the closed gates of the level crossing at East Guldeford.

"Yes, I do... See that church over to the right? Looks more like a big barn than a church, doesn't it? That place was used a lot by smugglers, but I couldn't get in to see it yesterday because it was locked... I'll tell you what I'm hoping to do, Jonathan. I'm going to concentrate on beating the coastguards at their own game and finding out how the smuggled goods are brought ashore. That's why I've left the *Dolphin*. It's not near enough to the sea."

"Rye Harbour is not far away, though," Jon said, "and there's Camber Sands, too. We were there yesterday."

"I know very well that there's a lot of ground to cover, but I'm going to do my best to find out something from the fishermen and inn-keepers at Dungeness and along the Dymchurch Wall. Now, Jon! If you and your friends could concentrate on trying to trace the two crooks you saw at Folkestone and the man who hit me on the head in the ruined school, that would be fine. I know very well that there's no evidence that either the woman or the man you saw in Paris live anywhere near here-----"

"We know that Ballinger has been to Dungeness," Jon interrupted. "Penny found her photograph on the station."

"Of course!" Wilson paused while the train from Ashford thundered by, and then, as the gates opened, he went on: "For a moment I'd forgotten that, and it does seem a strange place for an unusual woman like that to be visiting for curiosity or pleasure... It's possible that when you saw them at Folkestone they may have been going to London by road."

"I don't think so. If they were going to London there was no need for them to go as far as Hythe, and that's where we lost touch with them."

"Good point, Jon. Let's admit, then, that if they have anything to do with the smuggling, one or both of them are living within reach of the Marsh, although after what you told me about them I should think it doubtful if they are living together... Try and find one, or both, of them, Jon, and we may well be on the track of something; but I think your bird-watcher is the first link... How far are you coming with me? Come and have a look at Dymchurch. You could catch the Hastings bus back again before lunch."

Jon was beginning to enjoy himself. James Wilson was a strange mixture, and although he could understand Penny's annoyance with him this morning when he was rather condescending, he was certainly good company. Penny was really so very silly sometimes. Far too quick-tempered and impetuous. Maybe it wouldn't do her any harm to cool her hot head for a few hours.

So thought Jon, and perhaps it was as well for his peace of mind that Penny did not know what he was thinking!

They were negotiating the right-angled turns into Brookland, where the belfry stands in the churchyard, when Wilson spoke again.

"These Marsh churches fascinate me, Jon. They're far too big for common sense and they're all rather dank and neglected. I looked into this one yesterday, and it's pathetic in its present state. All the experts say that smuggled goods were once stored in the churches, but I can hardly imagine that our mysterious friends would follow that idea now. In the one at Ivychurch, over beyond Brenzett, which I was looking at yesterday, an old man working in the graveyard showed me some lidded stone coffins and said that once they'd been used for storing smuggled liquor - and for hiding the corpses of murdered men, too. There's an odd little church at Old

Romney, too - all that's left of the original village. We shall pass it in a minute and we might look at it together. It's a way off the road, and I didn't trouble yesterday."

They swung round Brenzett Corner, and Wilson went on to explain that the road along which they were now travelling was the old Rhee Wall, possibly built by the Romans, from the line of hills at the northern edge of the Marsh to Romney. The building of this wall with that facing the sea at Dymchurch first enclosed the Marsh proper and made it possible to drain it. Soon after they saw the little church of Old Romney ahead of them, about three hundred yards from the road, standing by itself in a field. It had a square tower with a pointed roof which was almost overshadowed by a giant yew tree.

"There's a lane off to the left," Jon said. "I should think the entrance to the church is there."

Two hundred yards up this lane on the right was a clump of elm trees and a little iron gate guarding a gravel path to the church. As Wilson pulled in to the side of the road Jon noticed a bicycle standing against the churchyard wall and was just saying, "There's someone else there, so it can't be locked," when a man came out of the church. Even at this distance Jon thought he recognized the grey tweed suit, and when the stranger put on a tweed hat to match he was sure.

"It's the bird-watcher!" he whispered. "Quick! Hide behind the trees. He mustn't see us."

They hurried behind the elm trees and had not long to wait before the man opened the iron gate and, still pushing his cycle, passed within a few yards of them. He glanced idly at the car and then went close to it and looked inside and then up and down the lane. Then, whistling quietly under his breath, he produced a pair of trouser clips from his pocket, secured the ends of his trousers and mounting his cycle with great deliberation pedalled off down the lane and then turned sharp left towards New Romney.

"And do you mean to tell me," Wilson said as soon as he was out of earshot, "that it was that miserable little specimen who hit me on the head in that

ruined school?"

"It's the man who spoke to me on the platform at Dungeness and said he wanted the Bird Sanctuary and then walked straight to the school. And it's the same little man who nearly missed the return train, tried to lie to me about oyster catchers and looked as if he could murder me when I tried to pick up his binocular case, which I'm sure was packed with something which wasn't there when he left the train. I admit that I didn't see him hit you on the head, but I can't imagine who else it could have been."

Wilson rubbed his nose reflectively.

"Neither can I, Jon... And yet he doesn't look as if he could hit anything - not even a haystack with a stone at ten yards' range! Well! well! We can easily catch him on that road, so let's just look inside the church first. For all we know he may have hit someone else on the head and left him in a stone-lidded coffin... Come on!"

Jon was now too excited to take much notice of the beautiful church, most of the woodwork of which was painted a soft grey. They found no bodies nor stone coffins, but noticed a big Royal Arms hanging over the chancel arch and a series of oval texts hung about the walls. The altar was bright and clean and the stone-flagged floor worn into hollows at the ends of the pews.

"This is far better than some of the churches I've seen," Wilson admitted. "It looks as if it's used sometimes, but I should think they've got rats here... Look! The ends of these hassocks have been chewed and some of the stuffing is coming out."

Jon looked over idly, but he was anxious to be off and not to miss this chance of trailing the bird-watcher.

"Let's go now," he pleaded. "I'll come back another time and search the place. Please hurry!"

"Don't worry. We'll catch him," Wilson smiled. "Our trouble will be to go slowly enough."

They caught him on the outskirts of New Romney and went on as slowly as they could until he turned into the long High Street. He was about a hundred yards ahead when he turned in to the yard of an inn called *The Fishing Boat*.

Wilson stopped the car.

"Now," he said, "I wonder what next? I suppose he'd recognize you more easily than me, and come to think of it, he only knows the back of my head! But we can't be sure of that, either, can we? I suppose he's just as thirsty as the next man - he may even be going in there for a meal - and I'm not at all sure that I won't risk it and go in there after him. Will you stay here on guard, Jon?"

Jon nodded. "But don't have your lunch in there. I shall want to know what's happening, and I don't think it would be wise for you to stare at him too closely."

Wilson strolled down the street, glanced at three or four people waiting opposite *The Fishing Boat* for the Folkestone bus and went into the inn.

Two minutes later their quarry came out of the yard - and not the inn itself - *without his bicycle*, crossed the road and joined the waiting passengers in the queue. Jon dared not move from the car, although he could imagine how Wilson, searching in vain for their quarry inside, was baffled. Then the bus rumbled up the street, passed the car and pulled up opposite the inn. The bird-watcher got on with the other passengers without looking guilty, or indeed without looking anything in particular, and as soon as the bus was round the corner Jon made a wild dash for the inn, nearly knocking Wilson over in the doorway.

"What's wrong, Jon? That chap is not in there. It's amazing, but he just isn't."

"He's left his bike in the yard and he's on the Folkestone bus. Do hurry and keep it in sight. For all we know he may get off anywhere."

Wilson was running almost before Jon had finished speaking, and within half a mile they were cruising along quite happily just behind the bus. It was impossible to distinguish the little man - Jon was now referring to him as B.B.W., which stood for Bogus Bird-Watcher - among the other passengers, but when they were satisfied that he had not alighted at Dymchurch it seemed fairly reasonable that he would go on to Hythe, and they were rather relieved when he did get out there.

"I must park the car," Wilson said. "Keep him in sight, Jon, but don't get too close. I'll soon catch you up."

Jon crossed the street and watched B.B.W. make his way along the busy pavement opposite. He was unhurried and seemed not to have a care in the world. He did a little shopping at the tobacconist's and bought a paper as well, and it was while Jon was waiting for him to come out of this shop that Wilson caught him up.

"All right," Jon said. "I've still got him, but you may have to take over soon as I mustn't be late for lunch. I dare not. I promised to be there, and I'm wondering what sort of a reception I'm going to get when I do get home."

Wilson laughed. "From Redhead, you mean? I'd like to hear her... Ah, yes, Here he is. I expect he's just bought a magazine on birds!"

They followed him discreetly up two residential streets, and then, waiting carefully at the corner, saw him mount the steps of an old-fashioned, double-fronted house.

"Now," Wilson said, "thanks to you, Jon, I think we know where this one has his nest. All we have to do is to stroll casually past that horrible-looking house and notice its name and number. I suggest that it will be called *Sea View*."

He was wrong. It was called *Bella Vista*, and the name was painted in lettering with a flourish on each of the pillars flanking the porch. On the edge of the roof of the latter was a sign which seemed to be covered with glass, announcing "Board Residence." The house was shabby, with the paint

peeling from the front door, and in one of the windows they noticed another, smaller, sign, bearing the word "Vacancies."

"I'm not surprised that they've got vacancies," Wilson murmured. "I can almost smell cabbage cooking from here... Just round the corner, Jon, and we'll have a council of war. Right. We'll keep a look-out every now and then and see if he's escaping, but I should think he's gone back for lunch. I think I want to know a lot more about this chap. I don't like the look of him - he's altogether too much like a bird-watcher and a naturalist. I hate to think he put me out by hitting me on the head, and I've made up my mind to stay here for a little while and see what he does when he comes out again. It's no use you staying, Jonathan - not only because you must get back to Rye now, but because he'll know you if he sees you... I think I shall stay at that inn in New Romney for a bit. It looked all right and I want to know why Bird-Watcher left his bike there. I suggest you ring me up there every evening about seven and report any progress, and I promise you that if I've got news or want your help I'll ring you at the *Dolphin*... I really will, Jon. I'm convinced now that you can help me so long as you can control your young Penny... And if either of us discovers anything really important we'll arrange a meeting... Do you agree?"

"I suppose so. I must get back, I know, but I hate leaving you now that we've run him to earth. You will ring up if you can, won't you?"

"Of course. Cheerio, Jonathan, and thank you," and he gripped Jon's hand. "I'm afraid you'll have to pass *Bella Vista* on the way back, but I think we might risk that... Hope you're not late for lunch."

Jon smiled at him and strolled back the way they had come. He was careful not to look up at the windows of *Bella Vista* as he passed its grim portals. If he had done so he might have caught just a glimpse of a face peering out at him from behind an aspidistra and the soiled curtains which shielded the front room from the curious eyes of the passers-by.

5. The Mortons Arrive

Almost as soon as she had stormed into the hotel with the astonished Arlette in her wake, Penny regretted her outburst of temper. Though it was true that James Wilson was rather condescending, she knew that, once again, she had been much too hasty.

"Sorry, Arlette," she said as they crossed the lounge. "But he is annoying and he will treat us like children. Is Jon coming?"

Arlette looked at her understandingly and then ran back to the window.

"No. He talk hard to James. He nod his head... Now he speak to Fred outside and they both get into ze car..."

She moved away from the window and saw Penny standing by the reception desk with a very white face, but before either could speak two guests came in and sat down with their morning papers. Mrs. Warrender followed them and frowned at the two girls.

"Penny dear, I've told you before that you must not come in and out of the hotel by the front door, nor must you use the lounge when we have guests. You must explain to Arlette. We have our own rooms upstairs. Where's Jon?"

"Out," Penny muttered. "Gone out somewhere on his own."

"Well, there's no need for you two to stay in waiting for David to telephone. Someone here can take the message and give it to you at lunch-time, and then we'll decide what to do. There is something I might want to do in Hastings this afternoon, and I'd like you two to come with me if I decide to go."

"Very well, Auntie. Come on, Arlette," and with her chin held high Penny went out into the sunshine of the *Dolphin's* cobbled yard.

"Message for you, Miss Penny," Fred smiled as soon as he saw the two girls. "Mister Jon says he'll be back to lunch and you're not to worry. He's gone off in Mr. Wilson's car... Nice young gentleman, that Mr. Wilson."

Penny gritted her teeth. "Thank you, Fred. Mr. Wilson was offering one of us a trip round this morning and we thought Jon needed a change most. He does so enjoy a ride in a car, and he's interested in engines, too. But thanks for the message all the same."

Vasson understood the situation perfectly - he had seen it arise before - but he did not smile when he said, "Thank you, miss," and turned away to his work.

Poor Penny! What did Wilson matter? But that Jon should go off like that with the man who had acted so casually to them and just leave a message about "not worrying" with Fred was almost more than she could bear. For a long minute she stood looking down at her red sandals so that Arlette should not see the tears in her eyes. The French girl may not have seen the tears, but she seemed to know exactly how Penny was feeling, for she put her arm round her friend's shoulders.

"Let zem go, Penny. They will get so very hot and dusty in ze car, and they will talk a great much and think they are ver', ver' clever... Let us go out and forget about zem. You will show me some more of the little shops in Rye, and I will buy somezing to take to my mother. I will send the post card also and you will help me... And I would like ze sandals like yours that are so red, only mine will be anozzer colour. You will help me choose... And Jonathan. He will come back later for ze lunch and will not ask us what we do, and he will think he has been ver' clever whatever 'e do. But he will not 'ave ze fun that we 'ave now... Shall we wear ze gloves this morning?"

Penny sniffed and then giggled.

"You are sweet, Arlette. Perhaps we *will* wear gloves. Let's look really smart in Rye this morning and surprise them all. Come up to my room."

And upstairs they both sat on Penny's bed and gossiped until nearly an hour had gone by. Arlette began to understand Penny very much better than she

had in Paris when she saw some of her treasures and how much she loved her room and the *Dolphin*.

"You see, Arlette, this is the only home I've got until my mother and father come back from abroad. I think that will be next year. Nearly all the time I've been at school and my parents have been away Mrs. Warrender has given me a home. When the *Dolphin* was left to her and we came here and she gave me this room I think I was happier than I've ever been since Daddy and Mummy went. They are so sweet to me here, Arlette. I'm just part of the family, although Auntie is far stricter with me than my mother ever was."

She got off the bed and looked out of the window.

"Don't you love this, Arlette?... Look! I can lean out and pick you a rose - you must wear it this morning. We know the garden is very small and nothing very much except old walls, but Fred keeps it tidy and Auntie grows the loveliest flowers, and every morning when I get up I lean out of this window and gloat over it. I remember that when Auntie first showed me my room I had to go to the window and look out so that Jon shouldn't see how I was feeling about it... I don't suppose that he'd have noticed, anyway."

Arlette, with her memories of the Avenue de Versailles and the everlasting roar of traffic, found it difficult to understand Penny's enthusiasm for a small, walled garden, but she did know that the British were peculiar about this sort of thing. She was also quite sure that during the last hour the two of them had become very firm friends and that was always a nice thing to happen. So, as she tucked the golden rosebud into her frock, she said, "Of course, Penny. It is a beautiful garden. I wish I had a garden in Paris... Now shall we go to the shops?"

Half an hour later, outside the Post Office, they met Mrs. Warrender, who looked at them both in surprise.

"You're looking very smart this morning, Penny. What's happened to you? Where did you say that Jon had gone?"

"I'm trying to do justice to Arlette, Auntie, and, of course I always want to be a credit to you. Perhaps I've turned over a new leaf to-day... We don't know where Jon is except that he's gone out in Mr. Wilson's car - the Mr. Wilson who left this morning."

"But why should he do that?"

"I think they just liked each other very much," Penny said with a bright smile, "and maybe they're going off to look at engines together or something. He left a message with Fred that he would be in to lunch... Now we're going to buy some sandals for Arlette, but we shan't be late back because we're expecting David to ring up soon."

"I don't suppose you'll want me with you then," Mrs. Warrender said. "Here's a little something for you to buy yourselves some ices, Penny... Goodbye!"

"I like your aunt ver', ver' much," Arlette said feelingly. "You are lucky with her, Penny."

"Of course I am. She's wonderful."

They spent a happy hour with ices, green sandals and in exploring the many little antique shops which jostle each other in Rye's narrow streets. Arlette bought a pair of brass candlesticks for her mother (although Penny could not for one moment imagine what Madame Duchelle would do with them) and a pewter beer mug for her father.

"But I never saw your father drink beer, Arlette! He always drinks wine."

"He will have to like this, Penny, because it is so English. He will like it, I know."

The first quarter after twelve was being struck by the two chubby, gilded Quarter Boys who sound the hours above the porch of Rye's great church as the girls, having finished their shopping, turned again into Trader's Street.

As they strolled under the archway into the *Dolphin's* yard Fred looked up from where he was sitting on the steps of his own "office," as he called it, and smiled at them.

Penny was longing to ask him whether Jon had returned and he must have guessed her thoughts, for he said in his slow Sussex, "Not back yet, Miss Penny. Leastways if he be I've not set eyes on him... I hear them young friends of yours, the Mortons, be coming this way again. It will be a spot quieter this time for them than it was the last, I reckon... Maybe it'll be rare interesting to see them two young cautions again."

"Maybe it will, Fred. I haven't really told Arlette about them yet, and there's not much time left-----"

And just then a voice from the other side of the yard called, "Telephone, Miss Penny. Call from London."

"Tell Arlette about the twins, Fred," Penny called over her shoulder as she ran in. "They're on the way."

She raced up the stairs to Mrs. Warrender's room and took the call there.

"Hullo! Is that you, David? It's me... No, *me!* Penny!... Jon? No. I don't know where he is except that he's out, but you don't have to tell him everything, do you? I mean I can understand what you say if you speak clearly. Where are you and how are you all? Isn't this marvellous? I mean you coming down... What? Will I stop talking a minute? You are *rude*, David!"

David Morton's voice, rather like Jon's, but more decisive, came faintly over the wire.

"Listen, Penny. I've only got three minutes and no more change. We're at Victoria now and are coming to Hastings, as it's quicker. We'll be there about half-past two. From there we'll get the first train on to Rye, but I don't know when that is. Will you work it out and meet us?... Grand!... Now the pips are going... Cheerio! See you later."

Mrs. Warrender walked into the room as Penny put down the receiver and flopped into a chair.

"Do you know, Auntie, that I could hardly get a word in edgeways with David? He just kept on talking until the pips went."

"I know, darling. I heard as I came up the stairs. You left the door open. When do they arrive?"

"Hastings at about half-past two... I suppose you couldn't *possibly* take us in the car and meet them? They didn't suggest it, but said they'd come in on the next train, but it would be wonderful if we could be there when they arrive."

"What about Jon? We should have to start in half an hour or so."

"He can come if he's back, I s'pose," Penny said, "but it's going to be a squash in the car as it is. I don't suppose he'll mind really if he's busy with Mr. Wilson."

"You're not having a silly squabble with Jon, are you?"

"Oh, no, Auntie, but if he goes off with this nearly strange man without saying good-bye, I can't be very interested in when he comes back, can I?"

Mrs. Warrender laughed.

"Go and rescue Arlette from Fred and meet me in the dining-room as soon as you can. I wanted to go to Hastings this afternoon, anyway... Off with you."

During their early lunch Penny was called again to the telephone.

"That you, Newpenny? Good. I'm in Hythe, and I've just missed the bus. Will you tell Mother and apologize?... Are you there, Penny?"

Penny was there and for a few seconds was so angry that she could hardly trust herself to speak. Just like him to ring up in that casual way as if

nothing had happened and say he'd missed the bus. And in Hythe, too, and never a word about what he'd been doing.

Penny gulped. "Yes, I'm here, Jon. How nice of you to ring. If your friend Mr. Wilson took you out, why can't he bring you back?"

"He can't, Penny. He's watching the Bird-Watcher. We've trailed him to Hythe, and I've got lots to tell you... Has David rung up, by the way?"

Suddenly Penny's temper evaporated. It was almost impossible to be angry with Jon for long because he just would not quarrel! Besides, it wasn't really worth it. And she suddenly liked the tone of his voice when he said, "Has David rung up, *by the way?*"

"I'm thrilled you've rung up, Jon," she said, "and it's wonderful news you've got. David has just telephoned and Auntie is taking Arlette and me into Hastings in the car to meet them. You'll be here when we get back, won't you? We'd better have a meeting with them as soon as we can in our room... I'll tell Auntie and they can keep some lunch for you... 'Bye, Jon." And not until she had rung off did she realize that he had not mentioned Arlette.

"That was Jon," she explained with a broad smile as she went back to the table. "Please don't be cross with him, Auntie, but he's at Hythe and has missed his bus. I've told him we're going to Hastings and that they'll keep him some lunch. Is that all right?... And please don't ask why he went in a car and has to come back by bus, 'cos it's very difficult to explain, but it's all quite all right," and when Arlette closed one eye significantly she nodded in reply.

Ten minutes later they were on their way and bowling along the straight, familiar military road between Rye and Winchelsea. On their left Penny pointed out to Arlette the squat ruin of Camber Castle, where they had first seen Miss Ballinger being baited by the Morton twins and where, indeed, they had first met David, too.

"I do hope you'll like our friends, Arlette. We think they're grand. And although the twins are cheeky and funny because they are so alike, they're really quite sensible, and they're splendid at adventures. You must try not to

be upset by them at first, but if you don't make them feel that they're babies and they like you they'll stick to you for always... And David, their brother, is one of the nicest boys I know."

"If I lived another hundred years, Arlette," Mrs. Warrender said, "I should never get tired of this road into Winchelsea and of the little town itself. You haven't really got time to stop and explore now, but the others must bring you over one day soon."

They had left the military road now and after a hairpin bend to the left crawled, in bottom gear, up towards a wonderful stone gateway, too narrow for two cars to pass. Down to their left the green levels stretched across to the sea over a mile away.

"The sea used to come right up to this hill," Penny explained, "and when we had our adventure at the *Gay Dolphin* we had a terrible storm and the sea came through again, but they soon mended the bank and stopped it, although it was jolly exciting while it lasted... Here's Winchelsea itself, and at the back of the town there's an old windmill we must show you... Jon had an adventure there and was nearly caught by Slinky, but we'll bring you here another day and tell you everything."

"I forgot to tell you girls," Mrs. Warrender said a little later, "that I'm going to an auction sale of furniture in Hastings. A friend rang me up this morning and told me that there are some rather good chairs, and I'd like to get them for the lounge. I'll drop you at the station first and the Mortons could leave their luggage there while you all go and have ices or some tea. You can either wait for me at the station or outside the saleroom. But *outside*, please, Penny. I couldn't face you all - especially the twins - inside the sale-room just when I'm about to bid for something."

The road dipped, twisted and turned through the lovely Sussex countryside, almost like a fairy road. The apples on the trees in the cottage gardens glowed with colour, while below them Michaelmas daisies and asters were in full bloom. They showed Arlette the mill and the ancient church at Icklesham and, a few miles farther on, the old forge at Guestling Thorn. Up the hill again to Fairlight, where the gorse blazed on the aptly named

Firehills high above the sea. Then down into Hastings and through the narrow streets of the old fishing town and out on to the front.

Penny loved Hastings - loved it not only for its lively vigour, its sunshine, its flowers and its lawns, but for the beautiful houses of another age in its gracious squares, and for the air of slightly shabby gentility that she found in some of the little roads behind the long promenade.

"I'll take you to the station now," Mrs. Warrender said. "The sale may take an hour or so, so you had better come and look there for me first. If the car is still there you'll know I'm inside, but if not come back here for me... Give my love to David and the twins."

The two girls got out, and Arlette waved to Mrs. Warrender "good-bye" as if she was never going to see her again.

"Now we meet your friends," she said brightly. "I like Madame Warrender ver', ver' much."

"So do I," Penny agreed, and turned into the booking hall to find that there was still five minutes to wait.

"I always feel excited on stations," she went on as they crossed the bridge and went on to the arrival platform. "I feel worse when I have to say good-bye, but when I come to meet someone I think it's wonderful - particularly if it's someone I like... Do you understand me, Arlette? I think you're wonderful, too, because I just go on chatting and you seem to understand. Sometimes I feel almost sick when I'm waiting for trains----- Here it is, Arlette. Stand close by me here by the steps and then we can't miss them."

The electric train slid into the station like a long green snake and suddenly the platform was full of people. Penny went pale with excitement and was moving her head rapidly from side to side until she felt quite dizzy when a voice behind her said, "Hullo, Penny. Where's Ballinger?"

She turned at the sound of the clear, familiar voice, and there they were. The twins! Each was wearing a belted blue raincoat, under which was a glimpse of an open-necked blue shirt. Their faces were tanned and rather

grubby and when they smiled, as they were smiling now, they seemed more alike than ever. Perhaps they were a little taller than when she had last seen them in the winter at Clun, but if they had grown one had not stolen a march on the other. Richard needed a hair-cut very badly, while Mary's curls were almost as untidy. Their bare brown legs were scratched and scarred and their sandals worn and shabby, and as Penny smiled a welcome she felt a sudden warm rush of affection for them both. She loved their loyalty and their courage and their sense of fun, and in Mary she loved and recognized a sensitive nature not unlike her own, except that this little girl would never be as impetuous. She loved, too, their friendliness. Friendship was a serious matter to the twins. The bonds between them were so strong that they set a high standard on friendship with others. It was not a thing to be undertaken lightly until they were quite sure that both sides had something to give, but once they were sure, then you had two friends for life.



"PLEASE INTRODUCE US TO YOUR BEAUTIFUL FRIEND, PENNY,"
SAID MARY

Mary was speaking.

"Penny! Don't stare at us like that. Other people stare at us. It is so lovely to see you and lovely of you to ask us... Do you know that we've been travelling almost since the dawn?... Penny! You haven't spoken to *him* yet! He's been longing to see you," and she pulled at a scarlet lead until there emerged from behind her a little black Scottie terrier with his tail between his legs.

"He just *hates* trains and stations," Mary explained as she lifted Macbeth in her arms. "People tread on him and there's a deafening noise-----"

"And all sorts of different and sometimes beastly smells," Dickie interrupted. "Hullo, Penny. Is this a friend of yours?"

"Yes, it is. I'm so sorry, Arlette," Penny began, and then was interrupted by the little dog who, egged on by Mary, began to lick her face rapturously. "But where's David? Isn't he here?"

"All our lives," Dickie said, "we've been trying to leave David behind, but somehow it never happens. I don't suppose you remember him very well, but he's bossy and interferin', and he doesn't really understand Mary and me. He's getting the bikes and the luggage out. We offered to help, but he wouldn't let us."

"He's just the same," Mary went on. "Organizin'. Always arranging things and not letting them happen... Where's Jon? Have you been trying to lose him, too?"

Penny flushed.

"Oh, no. He couldn't come to meet you. He'll be at the *Dolphin* when we get back. Auntie brought us over in the car."

"I hope he's not being rude and selfish," Dickie said solemnly. "We like to be met, and although we understand that sometimes it's difficult for grown-ups to manage it, we like our friends to come. We seem to remember that Jonathan sometimes was worse than our David over being bossy, don't we, twin?"

Mary nodded. "We do... Let's move out of this crowd and please introduce us to your *beautiful* friend, Penny."

Poor Arlette! She had not understood very much of what they had all been saying, but, like many others who met them for the first time, she could not take her eyes from the twins. Penny had not told her enough about them. They were smiling at her now - at least the girl was smiling and the boy was grinning and there was a very definite difference.

"I'm so sorry, Arlette," Penny was saying. "That was rude of me. Twins - this is our French friend, Arlette. We stayed with her in Paris, and she's now with us at the *Dolphin* for a fortnight... Arlette, the girl twin is Mary and the boy Richard. They're quite awful, but rather fun."

"My English is not ver' good," Arlette smiled as she held out her hand, "but I am ver' happy to meet Richard and Mary."

"You look very, *very* old to be Penny's friend," Mary sighed. "Are you?"

Arlette frowned. "Are I what?"

"How many years have you?" Dickie put in brightly.

"I am nearly seventeen," Arlette laughed. "It is not so old."

"I do hope not," Mary said. "You do seem to grow up quickly in France, but we're sure that you're very, very nice... Do you live near the Eiffel Tower? Penny sent us all post cards of that thing... Oh! Here's David."

Arlette looked up to see a pleasant-looking, bareheaded boy of about her own age sauntering towards them up the platform and pushing a bicycle. Behind him came a porter carrying three rucksacks and wheeling two small

bicycles. David Morton was shorter than Jonathan and much better looking and there was a pleasant, open-air look about him, too. Arlette had not yet had very much time to look about her in England, but she was already impressed by the fact that English boys seemed always to wear shabby old clothes if they could. Perhaps it was different in London? She would see! And then these English, when they meet and when they go they say little. Just "Ullo" and "Good-bye" or "Cheerio," and that is all. It is not that they seem to be shy. It is just that they do not seem to want to show the others that they are sorry or glad - or anything!

"Hullo," David said as he came up and grinned at Penny. "How are you? Where's Jon?"

"Hullo, David," Penny said, and Arlette noticed with interest that there was a little more colour in her face under the tan and freckles. "This is our friend, Arlette, from Paris. She's staying with us for a fortnight. Jon's not here."

To her surprise, Arlette found her hand grasped so firmly that she almost squealed in pain.

"How do you do, Arlette?" He certainly had a delightful smile. "Please don't speak to me in French. I'm not as good as Jon... All right, Mackie. I've only been away about five minutes..." Then he turned to the porter, who, although quite used to seeing strange people every half hour of his working life, was now staring as if hypnotized first at the twins and then at Arlette, and went on, "Please put the bikes and the luggage on the next train to Rye and we'll pick them up there... Is that all right, Penny? Sorry, but I don't know what you've planned, and I haven't said thank you for coming to meet us."

"Oh, yes, David. Auntie brought us in the car and will take us back presently if we can all get in. Let's go down into the town now."

So they all crossed the bridge again and went out into the station yard, which always smelled so delightfully of sunshine, hot tar and the seaside.

"I like this place," Dickie remarked. "I like the smell and I like the sea. When are you going to tell us about Slinky and the Ballinger? We don't really believe you, Penny."

"I wish we hadn't got our raincoats," Mary added irrelevantly. "We haven't got used to it not raining. It's been raining all the time in Shropshire... I don't know yet what we're going to do, but will you please carry my coat, David dear. I'm so hot and tired."

David glared at his sister without speaking, but when Arlette said, "If you are tired, Mary, I will carry it for you. I do not mind," he was quick to say:

"Certainly not, Arlette. She can easily carry it herself. You mustn't be taken in by these two. They'll try anything once."

"But I do not understand. If she is tired..."

"If she's as tired as that," David interrupted, "then Dickie can carry her coat for her... Where are we going, Penny?"

"Let's buy ices and go down to the beach. Auntie has gone to an auction sale, and we're to go there presently and pick up the car."

Penny and David walked on ahead while the twins, one on each side of her, took charge of Arlette. They had been suitably impressed by her generous offer to carry Mary's coat!

"Is something really happening?" David said. "Can you tell us yet?" and then very sensibly added, "It's grand to see you again, Penny; it really is. We missed you up there no end, and we've got a lot to tell you."

Penny blushed with pleasure.

"Yes, David. We're sure we're on to something very exciting and mysterious, but I think it would be fairer to wait until we get back to the *Dolphin* and meet Jon before we tell you any more, don't you? He's been on the trail of something this very morning in Hythe and missed the bus, and we had to start without him... We'll meet in our room as soon as we can and

tell you everything... David, I do hope you're not going to mind Arlette? She's awfully nice and she's really got all mixed up in this. Of course, there's no need to tell her about the Club."

"I should think not," David said quickly, "but I'm sure she's all right, Penny. The twins seem to have taken to her... Here's the sea. Let's find those ices."

The tide was out and the sun shining as they scrunched down the shingle to the golden sands with their ices. For half an hour they gossiped and lounged and made friends with Arlette, who, although she did not look quite at ease with her ice, seemed determined to do what these strange English did in their own country. Penny wanted to know about Peter and Jenny and Tom; but David insisted that they would exchange stories later when Jon was with them.

Macbeth recovered his spirits now that the horrible journey was over and began to chase pebbles thrown by Dickie and to bark, with as little purpose as King Canute, at the incoming tide.

They found the Auction Rooms without any difficulty. Mrs. Warrender's car was still there and parked behind a very smart and gleaming M.G. with a black body and green upholstery. David was examining this with interest when a girl of about twenty, looking as smart as the car, came out on to the pavement and paused to light a cigarette. Penny, Arlette and the twins were standing beside the *Dolphin's* old car and did not at first notice her particularly, but when David realized that she was the owner of the M.G. he flushed with embarrassment and moved back towards the others. The girl, who was certainly very beautiful and well dressed, gave him a disdainful glance as, cigarette between lips, she got into the driving seat and slammed the door.

Idly they watched her as she started the engine and backed a few feet towards them so that she could pull out into the road, and then David realized, from where he was standing on the edge of the pavement, that she was watching them intently in the little mirror on the right of the windscreen. Then, unexpectedly, she turned round and stared at them all before driving off quickly.

David shrugged his shoulders.

"Seemed rather pleased with herself, didn't she? I was only *looking* at her car, anyway... What's the matter with you, Mary? Seen a ghost?"

His sister was looking very puzzled, but her voice was very quiet when she replied, "No, David, I'm sure I haven't. She reminded me of somebody, but I can't quite remember..." and she pulled Dickie behind the others and began to whisper to him, when they were interrupted by Mrs. Warrender, who was looking rather cross and hot.

After greetings and the news that bikes and luggage had gone on by train, she said, "That's good. Shall we go straight home? I expect the twins are tired, and I'd rather have tea there than here... I'm sorry it's such a squash, but if the twins come in front with me you three big ones will have to manage somehow behind... Oh, I'm sorry, Mary. Haven't I spoken to Macbeth properly? Of course I remember him, and he's a very nice little dog. Hullo, Mackie."

They squeezed in somehow, and as soon as they were on the parade again Penny said, "How did you get on, Auntie? Any luck?"

"No, Penny. I'm very disappointed and upset. The stuff I wanted was good, and I would have liked it very much, but everything worthwhile was bought up by a smart-looking girl at the most fantastic prices. It was all rather extraordinary, because she was young and smart and didn't look as if she could possibly know the difference between good and bad furniture."

"We saw her, Mrs. Warrender," David said. "She came out just before you and drove off in a smart M.G. I was only admiring her car, but she looked at me as if I was a piece of mud."

"She looked at all of us rather as if we were that, too," Mrs. Warrender said grimly as she sounded her horn and rounded a bus. "There's something rather odd about her, though, because a dealer I know who was sitting next to me told me that he believes she is a representative of a concern somewhere round here which is buying up good furniture and selling it to American visitors. He said that the girl always comes round the day before

the sales and examines the furniture which is on view with a large woman with red hair and glasses who tells her what to buy. The dealer said that this woman, who never appears at an actual sale, knows her job and that everything which she does buy is first-class quality... Anyway, even if I could find this concern, I certainly could not afford to pay the prices she is likely to charge."

Penny, sitting between David and Arlette, gave a sort of strangled gasp, and when the former opened his mouth to speak she squeezed his knee in warning.

"How exciting, Auntie," she said at last, "but disappointing for you... Had this girl a green dress and did she wear her hair almost on to her shoulders and parted over one ear? No hat."

"That's right, darling. She was certainly very striking."

Penny was very subdued for the rest of the journey, and for once the twins had little to say, but if Mrs. Warrender noticed a rather subdued atmosphere in the car she said nothing. When she turned into Trader's Street, Penny was the first to see Jon sitting on the wall, but Arlette the first to remark on it.

The French girl had been shrewd in her comment that Jon would consider that his behaviour had been quite normal for, as he strolled over to them and opened the car door for his mother, he just smiled at them all cheerfully and said, "Hullo, Mortons. Glad to see you... Sorry I was late for lunch, Mother... You two girls been enjoying yourselves?"

Arlette looked doubtful at this question, while Penny, still with a little spirit left in her, turned her back and walked into the yard, where she greeted Fred with a radiant smile.

But any differences were forgotten when, after dinner, they all met in Jon and Penny's room. First David, with the twins interrupting him as usual, told them as quickly as he could the story of Jenny's silver spoon, which he christened "Lone Pine Five" because it was their fifth adventure together, and when the exclamations of envy and surprise from his audience had died away Penny said:

"It's wonderful, David. Really it is, and you can't guess how mad we are because we've missed all that fun with Jenny and Tom and Peter and the nasty boy Dickie calls Powerless Percy... But if we'd been with you we couldn't have been in Paris and have got to know Arlette and this new adventure would never have begun... Shall I tell them what's happened so far, Jon, or will you?"

"You start, Newpenny. It's your story as much as mine. If you get too excited I'll take over."

And so Penny told them everything from the beginning, and although she did get very excited Jon did not interrupt until he was able to bring them all up to date with the facts about his own adventure to-day with Wilson and the way in which they had tracked the bogus birdwatcher to *Bella Vista*.

When he had finished a moment's respectful silence was broken by Mary, who, with Mackie across her lap, was sitting on the floor by Arlette's chair.

"Now I can't wait any longer to tell you. Dickie and me have both talked about this and we're both quite sure. Listen now, 'cos all this fits in. The girl we saw coming out of the auction place and who bought everything Mrs. Warrender wanted, is someone we've met before. Didn't you recognize her, *any* of you? Jon would have known her... We'll tell you who she is. Her name used to be Valerie, and she's Ballinger's niece, and don't you remember her at the bungalow on Winchelsea beach?"

There was a long silence and then David banged his fist on the table, but it was Dickie who spoke first, and there was a quiver of excitement in his voice as he said, "We're right. Mary knew her at once. This all means something for us."

6. James Wilson Ambushed

As Jonathan Warrender disappeared round the corner on his way to the bus station, Wilson flicked away his cigarette end, followed him for a few yards and then ran up the grimy steps of *Bella Vista* and rang the bell.

As he stood under the portico with his back to the door a shadow moved behind the lace curtains in the front room and the muffled sound of a radio came up from the basement. A scrap of greasy newspaper scuffled down the gutter in the breeze and a grey cat picked its way sedately across the deserted street.

He rang again and suddenly the door opened.

The woman who stood there was neither very clean nor very tidy. Her hands were worn with work and her face lined with anxiety as she smiled nervously at her visitor.

"I'm sorry you had to ring twice, sir... Was it a room you were wanting?"

Wilson sniffed. He had been right about the cabbage, and correct, too, in his guess that the inside of *Bella Vista* would be no more attractive than the outside.

"Thank you," he said. "I would like to see your rooms, as I may be coming down here for a short holiday. I notice that you have vacancies at the moment."

"Oh, yes, sir. Please come in. I shall be very pleased to accommodate you at any time. Only one gentleman is with me at the moment, and he's very quiet and obliging and has his meals by himself in his own sitting-room in the front here. He wouldn't disturb you, sir... This way if you please, sir."

There seemed no escape without making the woman suspicious, and so Wilson suffered himself to be shown the interior of *Bella Vista*. While putting his head round the doors of the drab bedrooms and treading the gloomy linoleum-covered passages he was alert for the sound of a closing

door or, indeed, for any indication that the elusive bird-watcher was going out to birdwatch again.

"Quite! Quite. A very pleasant outlook!" Wilson said as he hurriedly closed the door of a small room with a faded wallpaper of pink roses. "And with a view towards the sea, you say? Excellent... You have another guest, I believe? May I ask if he is permanent?"

"I don't reely know, sir, but I think so. Mr. Rattray talks of staying on here during the winter, but I do assure you he's no trouble and very quiet and pleasant."

"I'm sure of that," Wilson agreed. "But I would like to see Mr. Rattray's sitting-room if you and he would have no objection. I have to do a certain amount of writing each day, and I must have quiet and comfort. If I came here, and if he did decide to go later, then perhaps I could have his room... May I see it, please?"

The landlady did not seem very happy about this suggestion, but Wilson insisted, and so they went down and the woman knocked at the sitting-room door. Wilson was close behind her when she opened it a few inches and said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Rattray, sir, but there's a gentleman here would like to glance at your room. Would you mind if he just looked in?"

"But the room is not to let, Mrs. Wilkins," came the reply. "You know quite well that I have fixed no date for my departure. I am perfectly comfortable here, but I will not be disturbed."

"That's all right, sir. I quite understand," Wilson said as, gently but firmly, he pushed in front of Mrs. Wilkins and with a cheerful grin put his head around the door. "Sorry to disturb you. Please accept my apologies."

But in a few seconds before the door was closed again he had seen enough to confirm that Mr. Rattray was Jon's bird-watcher. He was sitting at a table which was covered with a green plush cloth with some books and papers spread before him. At one end of the table was a large-scale map and

resting on the map was a heavy magnifying glass. Rattray himself was small and slight and without his tweed hat Wilson noticed that what little hair he had left was greying and wispy. His greyish tweed suit was shabby and marked with cigarette ash. He looked indecisive and insignificant. Pleasant enough, but vague, and as Wilson smiled he removed from his nose an old-fashioned pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and regarded the intruder almost nervously.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Wilkins," Wilson said as they closed the door. "That is certainly a very pleasant room. What did you say Mr. Rattray was doing? Just on holiday?"

Mrs. Wilkins lowered her voice respectfully.

"No, sir. Not exactly a holiday. Nature is what he's interested in. Out a great deal with his fieldglasses and notebooks and bird-watching and the like... Exploring the Marsh he is, too, and very interested in the old churches, but it's nature and birds and moths that he's studying all the time... Goes out at night sometimes, too, with all his paraphernalia."

"Does he walk everywhere, then?" Wilson asked with his hand on the front door.

"No, sir. He cycles a lot, but doesn't always keep his bike here... And when do you think you'll be coming, sir?"

"I'll let you know just as soon as I've made up my mind, Mrs. Wilkins, but many thanks for showing me the rooms."

As he ran down the steps he glanced back and caught a glimpse of Rattray's colourless face behind the dirty curtains of the front room.

"Not a very nice little man," Wilson thought as he walked back to the car. There were certainly many things about Rattray which made him suspicious, and it was rather intriguing to remember that the little man he had just seen fumbling with an old-fashioned pair of spectacles had, according to Jonathan Warrender, hit him very hard on the back of the head in the deserted school. There seemed little doubt that the bird-watching was

only a blind, although he seemed to be making a fairly good pretence at it, and it was significant that Mrs. Wilkins had admitted that Rattray was sometimes out at night.

The more Wilson considered it the more suspicious he became, until he began to wonder whether it was not his duty to go to the police and tell them what he had discovered with the help of the young Warrenders. Then he remembered that other newspapers would now be on the trail of smuggling on Romney Marsh and that his job was to get a story for his own paper before anyone else. The Warrender children were certainly intelligent, and he smiled to himself as he thought of the young redhead's outburst of temper and of their story of their first association with the mysterious woman they called Miss Ballinger. These two, with the French girl, might well be very useful, and there was something about all three of them that he liked very much.

But what should he do next? Jonathan had promised to telephone him at the *Fishing Boat* in New Romney this evening, and it was now only just after one. Then he realized that he was hungry and thirsty, so he went into an inn near the car park and sat down in the far corner of the room with a plate of sandwiches. Someone had left a paper on his table, and he was glancing idly at the cricket scores when a man walked in briskly and began to speak to the landlord. The man's voice was familiar; Wilson looked up sharply and recognized the new-comer as a reporter on another London paper. So they were already on the trail! With one hand he held his own newspaper in front of his face in the hope that he would not be recognized, and with the other he stuffed his uneaten sandwiches into his pocket. Two minutes later his car was on the road headed west for New Romney.

As he drove he wondered whether he was making a mistake in leaving Hythe. No other reporters could possibly know anything about Rattray, and it was still possible that this man, if watched and followed, would put him on to the trail of the smugglers.

And yet New Romney by its very position seemed a more likely centre of operations than Hythe; it was not very far from Dungeness, where he knew that something suspicious had been or was even now happening. If Penny was right - and there was no reason for doubting her - Miss Ballinger had

been on Dungeness station, although perhaps there was no logical reason why she shouldn't go there.

Wilson slowed down the car and put a lighted match to his pipe. Should he go back and concentrate on Rattray or was his first instinct about New Romney and the coast the one he should follow? Then he remembered that Penny had emphasized that she and Jon and Arlette would really help him if he didn't treat them like children! Perhaps he could turn them loose on Rattray now while he concentrated on the coast? He could easily ring up Jonathan from Romney and tell him what had happened. He puffed happily at his pipe, let in the clutch and drove on with the high bank of Dymchurch Wall towering above the road on his left.

In the village he stopped and walked across to the wall and the sea. Away to his right, a mile or more inland, he could see the square tower of New Romney's church and the houses of Littlestone and Greatstone sprawling along the coast. Further away still the great tongue of shingle swept round to the point of Dungeness where he could just see the lighthouse, a tiny silhouette like the tip of a pencil, against the clear sky.

Below the wall, as the tide was out, were miles of gleaming golden sands, while behind the wall, and sheltered by it from the south-westerly gales, was a row of bungalows and houses.

When he strolled back to the car, still feeling uncertain as to the best thing to do, he remembered that Rattray had left his bicycle in the yard of the *Fishing Boat* in New Romney. It was just possible that he would be well-known there, although he did not look the type of man who would be very much at home in such a friendly and cheerful atmosphere. This decided him, and ten minutes later he pulled up in the afternoon sunshine outside the *Fishing Boat* and was welcomed by the landlord, who introduced himself as Ted Banks.

"I want to make this place a centre for a few days," Wilson explained. "If you're a native of Romney, I dare say you can tell me something about it... I'm a writer, and I'm going to make the Marsh the scene of a new book."

After he had put the car away and unpacked, he went downstairs for his tea. He was served by Mrs. Banks, who already seemed to know what he had told her husband, and the two of them gossiped to him over his meal. It seemed that the only other people staying in the inn were an elderly couple who were out for the day, and it was not long before he was able to introduce the subject of Rattray.

"All this district is of interest to naturalists, isn't it, Mr. Banks? Bird-watching, flowers and that sort of thing?"

"Yes, sir. It's a wild and lonely place in the winter, and there are days when we hardly have a soul in the *Fishing Boat* till the evening, but in spring and summer there are always some visitors and it's surprising how many now are interested in birds and come here with glasses and notebooks and cameras."

"I suppose some of them try to take pictures of birds at night, don't they? I've often wondered how long they have to sit and wait with their flashlight apparatus until they can take some of these wonderful pictures... I'm interested in photography, but I've never done flashlight work. I suppose all bird pictures are interesting, but I doubt if I'd have the patience to sit for as long as some of these enthusiasts must do."

Mrs. Banks moved to the door.

"I must be about my work, sir. We'll do our best to make you comfortable here," but when the door had closed her husband, who was certainly the gossip in the Banks' family, had something else to say.

"Odd you just saying that about bird-watchers, sir. There's a rum little chap lives over at Hythe doing that sort of thing. He's been in here once or twice of late at different times. Quiet, he is, and never goes into the bar, but pleasant enough, and very interested, like you, sir, in anything we can tell him about this district. Sometimes he's come in here at night and the missus has given him an evening meal and then off he goes on his bicycle with his camera, and sometimes we don't see him for four or five days."

"Very interesting," Wilson said as he felt for his cigarette-case. "I'd like to meet him and see what he could teach me about bird photography. I wonder he doesn't stay with you here, though, if he's using Romney as a centre."

"Says he doesn't like staying in an inn," Banks laughed, "and that he must have a private sitting-room which we couldn't offer him here... He'll turn up to-morrow, I shouldn't be surprised, as he came in this morning and left his bike."

That seemed good enough, so Wilson changed the subject and went for a stroll in the town.

While he was out he made up his mind that to-night he would go to Dungeness. The more he thought about the whole problem of smuggling the more he realized that Dungeness was a likely place for goods to be brought ashore. He realized that because it was lonely it might, perhaps, be so obvious a spot that coastguards and police would be specially alert; but what he had seen of it the other day made him fairly confident that the opportunities of something sinister and underhand were greater there than along the coast between Greatstone, Dymchurch and Hythe. It would be useless to go in his car and too far to walk, so a bicycle was probably the answer. Perhaps Mr. Banks would oblige?

But when he got back the inn was open. Banks was much busier and did not seem quite so inclined to chatter. It may have been imagination, but somehow Wilson felt that once or twice he looked at him suspiciously - or was it uneasily? Mrs. Banks served him an extremely good dinner, but had nothing special to say; and for some reason which he could not explain Wilson felt that the friendly atmosphere of welcome which had been noticeable when he arrived had now disappeared.

After the meal he waited about until Banks was not too busy and asked him bluntly if he could lend him a bicycle.

"At this time o' night, Mr Wilson? Are you going bird-watching, too?"

"I want to go to Dungeness. I told you I'm going to write a book and I want the atmosphere. It's no good going in the car."

"Why not, sir? Are you staying out all night?"

Wilson found it difficult to give a reason for not wanting a car.

"Of course not. I'd be glad if you'd lend me a key to the side door, and, of course, I'll leave you a deposit to cover the cost of the bicycle, and the car as well. You can trust me. I shall come back. It's just that I have an idea that I want to explore that district at night."

"It's lonely enough at the best o' times, but at night it's more than quiet. There's the lighthouse, o' course, and a few cottages and fishermen's places, but I don't reckon you'd be very welcome snooping round there, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Look here, Banks, what I do is my business. I'll pay you a pound if you can lend me a bicycle and leave a deposit of ten pounds just in case I lose it or smash it or run off with it."

This offer proved tempting; Banks took Wilson out into the yard and showed him an old bicycle which had been re-painted a rather hideous green.

"Very well, sir. You've reminded me that I'm not minding my own business, but there's the bike - it's got lamps on it - and you can have it if you like. You can have a key to the back door, too, but I'd be glad if you'll bolt it and put up the chain if you come in after we've gone upstairs... Now I must get back, sir. We're busy to-night."

They went in again together and Banks gave him the key just as the telephone, which was on a ledge at the back of the public lounge, began to ring.

Banks lifted the receiver and then beckoned to Wilson.

"For you, sir," and gave him a strange look as he went back to his customers.

It was difficult to hear because of the noise around him, but the voice coming over the wire was vaguely familiar.

"Is that Mr. James Wilson, please? I want Mr. James Wilson."

"This is Wilson. Will you speak louder, please?"

"Good! This is Jonathan Warrender from the *Dolphin*."

"Jon! I'm glad you rang up. Have you any news?"

"Yes. Is it safe for me to speak to you? It's all right this end."

"I can't say much, Jon. This telephone is in the public room, and there's a lot of row going on. Just tell me what you can."

He looked round as he was speaking and saw Banks watching him curiously as he polished a glass.

Jon told him all that had happened in Hastings and how the three Mortons and Penny were confident that the girl at the auction sale was still connected with Ballinger and that evidence seemed to show that the latter was running a second-hand furniture business somewhere in the district.

"But I can't see how that ties up with the bird-watcher and Dungeness and that bang on the head," Jon went on. "I wish we could have another talk. Can we meet tomorrow, and how did you get on this afternoon? Anything more suspicious about the bird-watcher?"

"Listen, Jon. I can't say much now except that I'm sure your suspicions are well founded. I've left our naturalist friend alone for the present, but I like New Romney and am having an interesting look round. I'll ring you up to-morrow, and if you're not in I'll leave a message."

"But what shall we do to-morrow? I wish you would speak more freely."

"I can't now. If I have time I'll write. Don't come over here until I tell you."

"Why don't you ring us from a call-box, and then we could talk more easily."

"Very well. I'll do that in the morning before ten. That's a good idea, Jon. Now I've got to go out. Give my love to Redhead and Arlette... 'Bye."

He went upstairs very thoughtfully and changed into his oldest clothes. Jon's news was important and interesting, and if to-night he could discover something suspicious on the actual coast - something which he could link up with the information he had been lucky enough to get from the Warrenders - then he was sure he would be well on the way to an exclusive story and to helping the authorities as well.

When he came down, Mrs. Banks was whispering to her husband at the bottom of the stairs.

"Good night to you both if I don't see you when I come in," he said. "I promise to be quiet, and thank you for the key. Here's the pound for the bicycle, Mr. Banks, and here's my cheque as a deposit."

It was already dark when he wheeled the green bicycle out of the yard. A bat was fluttering crazily over the roof-tops and three young men and two giggling girls were talking on the street corner. From an open window came the sound of a B.B.C. announcer's stilted voice reading the news.

The bicycle was not very comfortable, but as the evening was hot and stuffy he welcomed the little breeze which met him as he pedalled down the long, straight road from Romney to Littlestone-on-Sea, where he turned to the right for Dungeness. The western sky in front of him still carried a faint glow, but far brighter than the stars now beginning to show was the swinging, intermittent beam from the lighthouse.

Wilson cycled on along the concrete road through the muddle of bungalows and small houses known as Greatstone. Lights in the front windows of these little homes gave him glimpses of people at supper and people listening to the radio - ordinary, simple people, who surely would never have anything to do with smuggling!

The sea was behind the sand dunes on his left, and when he got off to switch on his lamps he could hear its soft murmur very clearly. The breeze had dropped now and it was very hot and still.

The light faded in the west and night came down as he left the last of the little houses behind him. Although there was no breeze the perspiration was wet on his face as he pedalled forward, feeling very much alone. In the distance were the vague shapes of buildings and on the right the narrow track of the little railway. There was no sand now. Only shingle. The road was built on shingle. The railway was laid on shingle. The sea was a quarter of a mile away behind a great bank of shingle.

The road turned sharp to the right inland and crossed the railway. Then an inn, with the dark shapes of three men standing in the lighted doorway, who watched him cycle past in gloomy silence. Should he go back and greet them naturally and go into the inn as he had a right to do? How could they possibly be suspicious of him? They looked like fishermen and were probably going out to sea in an hour or so.

He cycled on, not really knowing why he did so or what he was going to do. The road turned back towards the coast, and he passed the coastguard station with its wireless aerials. The lighthouse was nearer now, and as the great beam swung round regularly the darkness behind it seemed denser than it really was, but he was able to pick out the silhouettes of some buildings on the right of the road. A few of these showed lights in the windows, but most of them seemed to be rather peculiar and irregular shapes. Then he remembered that they must be bombed ruins of houses and bungalows destroyed in the war. There were some wooden shacks and old railway carriages, too, and once or twice he felt that he was being watched by men who stayed in the shadows outside these primitive homes. He passed the lifeboat station, realized that he was almost at the Point and suddenly made up his mind to leave his bicycle and go and look at the sea. Later, perhaps, he would explore the ruined school again, but first he would rest and try and think things out.



WILSON'S HEART THUDDERED WITH EXCITEMENT AS HE WATCHED THE MAN
IN BATHING TRUNKS CLIMB UP THE GRASSY BANK.

On his left now were some piles of fishermen's gear - an upturned dinghy, a tangled coil of wire hawser and some wooden boxes - so he dismounted, switched off his lamps and laid the bicycle on the shingle in the lee of the boat. Then he looked back and stiffened when he thought he saw a moving shadow on the other side of the road about a hundred yards away. He stared hard into the blackness, but when the beam from the lighthouse swung, round he saw nothing suspicious, and so, rather uneasily, he began to climb the ridge of shingle towards the sea. As soon as he reached the top he flopped down thankfully and looked below him.

The tide was up and lapping gently against the stones perhaps two hundred yards away. The night was clear, still and hot, but there was no moon yet, and until the lighthouse flashed the surface of the water was very dark. Not very far away to his right was the actual tip of Dungeness. Out at sea he could see the lights of big ships passing up the Channel quite close in, while only about a hundred yards from the shore was a small fishing-boat without lights.

He fumbled for his pipe and then realized that it might be wiser not to strike a match, and was still wondering why a boat, so close to the shore, should be in darkness, when the lighthouse beam swung round. In the split second when the water below him was lit up he saw the dark head of a swimmer close to the shore. His heart thudded with excitement as he waited for the light again. When it came he saw quite clearly that a man in bathing trunks, with what looked to be a small hump or bundle on his back, was climbing up the shingle bank from the sea.

Tremendously excited, Wilson crawled forward and without thinking what he was doing got to his knees on the top of the ridge so that he could see better. A sharp stone jabbed his kneecap and as he shifted and put his weight on his hands he slipped forward down the slope with a clatter of falling shingle. The beam swung round again and he saw the man below him fall flat on his face. Wilson scrambled to his feet and ran forward without any clear idea beyond that of intercepting the unknown swimmer.

From behind him came a long, shrill whistle, but when he turned to look over his shoulder he could not see who had given the warning. He ran on, stumbling over the loose shingle, but the sinister fugitive was too quick for him, and long before he reached the sea the man was half-way to the fishing-boat. Feeling uncommonly foolish, Wilson stood on the edge with the little waves lapping his shoes, and listened to the throb of the boat's engine as it spluttered into life. The beam swung round again and gave him a glimpse of the boat moving gently towards the shore and the swimmer's head very close to it.

There was nothing else to do, so he turned disconsolately and trudged up the slippery slope again. It was possible, of course, that the boat would return or even put in somewhere else, but he had spoiled his chances now by running forward when he should have stayed hidden. He felt confident that there was nothing innocent about either the boat or the swimmer, and it suddenly occurred to him that his duty now, without a doubt, was to report what he had seen to the police or to the coastguards. He remembered passing the coastguard station; the sensible thing to do would be to go there at once. Perhaps somebody would suggest going out to sea in search of the mysterious fishing-boat and help him to a better story than he could find by himself?

His bicycle was where he left it, but not until he had picked it up did he realize that the front lamp was missing. He struck matches and looked under the upturned boat and among the wooden boxes and piles of rubbish, but without success. Remembering the warning whistle, he wondered whether the lamp could have been deliberately stolen, although this seemed unlikely.

There was no sense in wasting further time, so he switched on his rear lamp, mounted and pedalled back the way he had come.

It was very dark now. The shadowy shapes of the ruined houses, the shacks and the few bungalows on his left showed no lights. The swish of his tyres on the rough concrete road and the click of one of the pedals were the only sounds to break the silence.

The flash from the lighthouse behind him had just shown him a bungalow standing back from the road behind a low whitewashed wall, when, without the slightest warning, the bicycle was suddenly checked and he was thrown forward over the handlebars. In the few confused seconds before he lost consciousness he was dimly aware of a shadowy figure standing over him with something in its hand.

He had not even seen the wire stretched taut across the road between the bungalow and a telegraph post - a wire, invisible in the darkness, but just high enough to throw him from his bicycle.

7. Channel View

As soon as breakfast was over next morning at the *Dolphin* Jon and Penny shepherded their guests upstairs to their room.

"Of course we know that this is a very nice secret place," Dickie remarked to Arlette when Penny had closed the door, "but what we want to know is whether we're going to spend the whole holiday in here. School is sort of looming round the corner, isn't it, twin, and we don't want to waste time."

Arlette, and Penny, too, for that matter, looked surprised at "looming round the corner," but Mary said, "Don't be silly, Dickie. We've got to lay our plans, and this is the place to lay them."

Penny led Arlette over to the low ledge under the leaded windows and pointed out the words scratched upon the glass by some prisoner years ago - *God save England and Ye Towne of Rye*, and the two elder girls sat there with the sunshine playing round their heads.

Macbeth wandered round, sniffing in the corners, the twins sat on the table swinging their brown legs, while Jon leaned against the fireplace.

"You'd better take charge, David," he said. "You're the boss of this show."

Arlette tried to make a mental note of yet another English idiom which she had never heard before, while David said, "Certainly not, Jon. This is your show. We've only come along to help. You and Penny have been doing the work and know far more than we do, and I'm sure you've got some ideas."

"Very well," Jon agreed. "But only because we've had a start... Now then. We told you everything last night, but is there anything else you and the twins want to know before we decide what to do to-day?"

"I don't think so, except that I wish we could meet this chap Wilson. He's in a place called New Romney, isn't he? Is that where you rang him up?"

"Yes. He was very vague, but as I told you, he'll be ringing up at any moment, and I suppose I ought to be ready to take the call."

"I warned them at the desk," Penny said. "They'll put the call through to your mother's room and Elsie is cleaning down there and promised to come to the bottom of the stairs and yell."

"Good, Newpenny... Wilson is all right, David. You'll like him, and we're in this together with him. It took him a long time to realize that we knew what we were talking about, and Penny got a little temperamental with him, but that's all over now... If you've had time to think all this over since last night, I wonder if your idea is the same as mine."

"We wonder whether he's got any ideas at all," Dickie said as he slid from the table out of reach of his brother's avenging hand. "We'd better tell you what we think, Jonathan, and then you won't have to ask so many questions."

To her surprise, Penny found herself saying, "Don't be so cheeky, Dickie. Jon has been doing all the work and thinking here as usual, and now you've jolly well got to do as he says. If he wants to know what you think, I expect he'll ask you - if we've got time to listen."

"Penny!" Mary said in shocked tones. "How absolutely *brutal* of you to talk to little Dickie like that. But we do know that you *always* stick up for poor Jon," and she closed one eye and grinned wickedly at her twin. But when the laughter had died down she went on, "We will be sensible really, Jon. I expect you'll suggest that what we shall have to do - all of us, I mean - is to find Ballinger, Slinky and Valerie. You seem to think that they can't be very far away, so if you've got a map of the district may we look at it?"

"Good idea, Mary... I think I've left the map in my room. Do you mind running down for it, Penny? And you could ask about the telephone at the same time."

While Penny was out he went on, "Mary is right, of course. Somehow or other we've got to find those three. Wilson seems to have run the bird-watcher to earth in Hythe, but before we do much about him we must know

what Wilson has been doing. He may have very different ideas since yesterday... Thanks, Penny. Now let's look at the map... No telephone call?"

"No!" she puffed. "They've promised faithfully to call us."

They spread the map on the table and crowded round Jon. The scale was one inch to one mile, and so most details of the countryside were clearly marked.

"There's an awful lot of blue sea on this," Dickie remarked, "but I s'pose we haven't got to do anything about that yet... It only goes as far as a place called Dymchurch up in the corner here. Where's Hythe?"

"Four miles farther on," Jon said. "I've got the next map, but this one is enough for us to start on because it shows Rye and Hastings and Romney, too... Shall we divide this map into squares with a pencil, David, and explore each square at a time until we're quite certain that Ballinger and Co. are not in that particular part of the country?"

David stood back from the table.

"By the look of the map," he said, "there are very few towns and villages or even houses on the stretch of the Marsh shown by this map. There are not really many roads or footpaths either, so I think we could do this job more quickly if we split up into parties and each party took a part of the map to explore and stuck to that. We've all got bikes, and as this country is flat we should be able to do a lot to-day and then meet and compare notes this evening... What do you think?"

"All right except for the cycling bit," Dickie said. "I should think all this Marsh place is very windy, and I bet the wind will be blowing the wrong way."

"And what about Mackie?" Mary said. "He hasn't got a bicycle."

"No! But you brought his basket," David said. "I saw it on the back of your bike, and don't interrupt again."

It's wonderful how I think of things," Mary murmured as she tickled Macbeth behind his ears.

Arlette thought the same about cycling as Dickie, but did not feel that this was the time or place for her to voice an objection. This was all so exciting that she was prepared to suffer tortures if she could be sure of sharing in the adventure.

Jon agreed with David's idea of splitting forces, and after some argument they made their plan, although the more they discussed it the more they realized that the elusive Ballinger might not really be within their reach, but living many miles inland somewhere in Kent or Sussex.

"But we must try," John said. "We might be lucky, and if we don't get a clue to-day we may decide to do something quite different to-morrow... Let's just run over it again... Twins first. We'll arrange for a good supply of sandwiches for you, Dickie, and then you'll go off on your bikes with Mackie and explore the villages on the Marsh nearest to us here. There's only one road out of Rye to the Marsh and that is the way you'll go... All right, Dickie, take the map. That's a good idea. You go through East Guldeford, Brookland and then, after you've crossed the railway, you come to another main road, and there you turn left and go through Brenzett and Snargate until you come to that village on the very edge of the Marsh and on the canal called Dore Street, and that's all you'll be able to do to-day, although you might come back through Fairfield. I'm not sure you two haven't got the hardest job, but we know how tough you are when you're on the trail."

Mary looked at him suspiciously and then glanced at her twin.

"That's what we hate, isn't it, Dickie? People trying to be *funny* and grown-up. We expect you've made us go this way on the map because you think something more exciting will happen the other way, but we'll go-----"

"And we'll go somewhere else if we think we will," Dickie added. "You others might just as well stay here because we shall soon get a clue... Maybe that's what you are plannin'? You're going to stay here and gorge

yourselves while we tire ourselves out cyclin' all over this awful Marsh with just a packet of sandwiches. Just tell us again what *you're* going to do."

Jon was rather taken aback at this outburst, but he was out of practice with the twins.

"I think Arlette and Penny should go to Hythe by bus and see if they can find the bird-watcher. I can explain where his house is, and it will be their job to follow him and see if he leads them anywhere suspicious. I'm as sure as I can be that he is a link between somebody else and Ballinger, although I've got no proof of it... David and I are going to contact Wilson first if we can - he ought to have rung by now - and then we're going to try the coast from Dungeness to Dymchurch."

"It sounds as if you've kept the most exciting job for yourselves," Penny said, "and I can't really see why we have to split up, but we'll do our part. Come on, Arlette! Hythe for us and no gloves to-day."

The twins were away first with Mackie in his basket on the back of Mary's bicycle, and then Arlette - delighted when she realized that she was to be spared a cycle ride - and Penny went off on the Folkestone bus.

As soon as they were alone Jon said to David, "I'm worried about Wilson. He promised to ring from a call-box this morning. I'm going to telephone him at his inn and see if he's there. It's very important for us to keep in touch."

"Let's use a call-box ourselves, then," David said. "It might be wiser."

"I want to speak to Mr. James Wilson, please," Jon said as soon as the *Fishing Boat* answered. "Will you please fetch him?"

"I want to speak to him myself," came the answer.

"This is a friend of his speaking," Jon went on. "Will you please explain what you mean? Are you the proprietor?"

"I am, and I will explain. Mr. Wilson borrowed my bike last night, and he hasn't come back with it yet."

"Your bike? Didn't he come in his car?"

"Yes, he did. It's still in the yard, and I shall charge him for parking it. Do you want to leave a message if he does come back?"

"No, thanks - oh, yes. Just tell him a friend from Rye rang up, please... Thank you... Good-bye."

As soon as Jon had explained the position David said, "Come on, Jon. Let's get to Romney as quickly as we can and have a look round. Wilson may have come back by then. If he hasn't, then we ought to be doing something about it."

But Wilson was not at the *Fishing Boat* when they called an hour later, and Banks was very bad-tempered about the whole affair.

"We're friends of his," John explained as they stood on the doorstep, "and we promised to meet him this morning. We rang from Rye about an hour ago, and you said he'd gone out last night and not come back. Can you tell us anything else, please?"

"No, I can't, and I wish I could. There's something funny going on round here, and I don't like it."

"What sort of thing, sir?" David said.

"Well - goings and comings and borrowing my bike and going out at night to Dungeness of all places. I told him it was a barmy thing to do."

"Why is it so silly?" David asked again, and Banks looked at him keenly.

"You don't seem to do anything but ask questions, young man. I wish I knew what you two are really up to."

"We're not up to anything," Jon explained. "We just want to find Mr. Wilson. Anyway, we'll go out and look for him. If he should come back,

will you please tell him Jonathan Warrender looked in for him and if we don't come back first will he please ring us in Rye? He knows the number... But he'll be back if he borrowed your bike."

"What sort of a bike is yours?" David asked. "I saw one in the yard."

"That's not mine. That was left here yesterday by a chap who does bird-watching. He'll be back for it. Mine's green, and I shall charge him for leaving the car."

The boys thanked him as he closed the door and then went to look at Wilson's car.

"He might have left a message in it," Jon suggested, and then went on, "It's odd that he hasn't come back nor rung up. I don't like that chap much either, and I'm wondering if he knows more than he says. The bike you saw - there it is, over there - belongs to Bird-watcher, as I told you. I saw him leave it there yesterday. Maybe the girls will have to follow him back here for it later on. What shall we do?"

"We'd better go to Dungeness and have a look round. Even if he didn't go there, we said that was part of our job, didn't we? Come on! That chap is watching us from the window."

"It would be more sensible to go there by road in case we meet him cycling back," Jon agreed, "but it's a long walk. Let's try the little train."

They did not have to wait long at the station and David was as excited as Jon when the train, pulled by a perfect miniature of a Pacific locomotive, named *Green Goddess* came into the station on time. There were very few people aboard, so the two boys were able to talk freely as they puffed out of Romney and made for the coast at Greatstone. By the time they reached the halt known as Maddison's Camp they were battering against a strong wind. The sky was overcast and great clouds were piling up out of the west. A spatter of rain and hail slashed at the windows on the sea side of the train and suddenly the back of the houses facing the line looked dingy, drab and almost sinister instead of passably cheerful, as some of them managed to do when the sun was shining.

"Why do people live here?" David asked. "What can it be like in the winter?"

"Ghastly, I should think, but I expect they come because they're sick of towns and the little bit of shingle they can buy here is really their own... We're nearly there, David. That's the lighthouse and that square, white building not far off is the foghorn. Now look out of this side and you can just see the ruined school. I think we'd better go there first."

When they got out at the station the wind was so strong that for a moment they held on to each other. It howled and roared over the flat wastes and round the lighthouse towering above them. It whipped the smoke and steam from the engine's little smoke-stack into nothing and flattened the sea poppies growing in the shingle at the side of the track, and as they stumbled up the old full-gauge railway lines towards the school it whistled and sang strange songs among the telegraph wires.

It was not very pleasant exploring the school because the wind played odd tricks in those empty rooms and corridors and the house was full of mysterious groans and whisperings and thuds. But there was nobody there and no sign that anybody had been there since they had found Wilson stunned on the floor. Jon showed David the loose floorboard with the sketch of the grasshopper and they even searched for cigarette ends or pipe ash, without success.

"We'd better wander back along the road," Jon suggested. "Maybe we shall meet somebody we can ask. We've nothing to work on because we don't know why he came - except that I suppose he'd have a look at the sea and any boats that might be about at night... I wish this wind would drop."

"Too windy to rain properly, anyway," David replied. "Let's try the beach first and then look at those fishermen's shacks."

They neither saw nor found anything unusual on the beach except that the sea was almost calm behind the shelter of the Ness itself. Two fishermen were at work on their nets in the lee of an upturned boat some way up the beach, but neither of them answered the boys' greeting beyond a surly nod.

"I don't like this place," David said. "I've never seen anything like it. And I don't think the twins will like this wind."

"It will blow them across the Marsh," Jon laughed, "but we shall have to go and fetch them if it doesn't drop this afternoon. They'll never cycle against it... Let's get on the road and begin to walk back. I'm sick of this shingle."

They had only been on the road five minutes when David found the green bicycle pump lying in some rough grass at the foot of a telegraph pole.

"That man at *The Fishing Boat* said his bike was green, didn't he?" he said as he picked up the pump. "Green bikes are unusual. I wonder if your friend Wilson came this way?"

Jon took the pump and was looking at it when David made another discovery.

"There's a loop of wire with the end broken round the bottom of this pole. I wonder why?"

Jon crossed the road and leaned against the low whitewashed wall of a repulsive-looking bungalow called *Channel View*. The wooden gate to a concrete path was banging in the wind, and just inside, on the shingle, was a tangle of wire. David walked in and lifted a snapped end.

"That's odd, Jon. We'd better ask here, I think," but before the other could answer the front door of *Channel View* opened and a tired-looking woman scowled at them from the step.

"What are you boys doing here? Do you want anything?"

"Not really, thank you," Jon replied. "We're looking for a friend."

"This is a lonely place at the best of times," the woman said with her eyes on the pump in his hand. "I reckon I see most of those who come along this road. What's your friend like and where did you find that bike pump?"

"Over there on the other side of the road," David smiled. "Is it yours?"

"It's me husband's. He was pumping up his tyres before he cycled into Lydd this morning. Give it here, please."

David handed it over and the woman closed the door.

"Let's walk off slowly," Jon said. "I don't believe that pump is her husband's. I saw her face change when she asked about it. I'm puzzled about that wire, too... Let's walk on for a bit while she's watching us and then come back and explore at the back of the house."

David agreed. "Good enough. She soon forgot to ask what our friend was like when she got the pump in her hands, didn't she?"

They walked on for a hundred yards and then dodged down between two empty bungalows to the railway line and from there made their way back towards *Channel View*.

"I counted the houses," David said. "It's ten along. There it is. The one with that shed by the line. Let's get behind that."

It was an ordinary small wooden shed with a window at one side, and as they crouched down behind it Jon whispered, "I wonder what they keep here? They wouldn't want garden tools without a garden, would they?... Stay here. I'll creep round and look in the window. I'm tall enough to see in, I think."

He was back in twenty seconds.

"I can't see much, but there's certainly a bike there, and that's odd if Mr. Channel View is riding his green one to Lydd. P'raps the one in there belongs to his wife, although she doesn't look as if she would enjoy cycling."

"True enough. I'd like to see if the bike in there is green. Let's try and get in and see."

"That's house-breaking and we could easily be seen from the house," Jon objected.

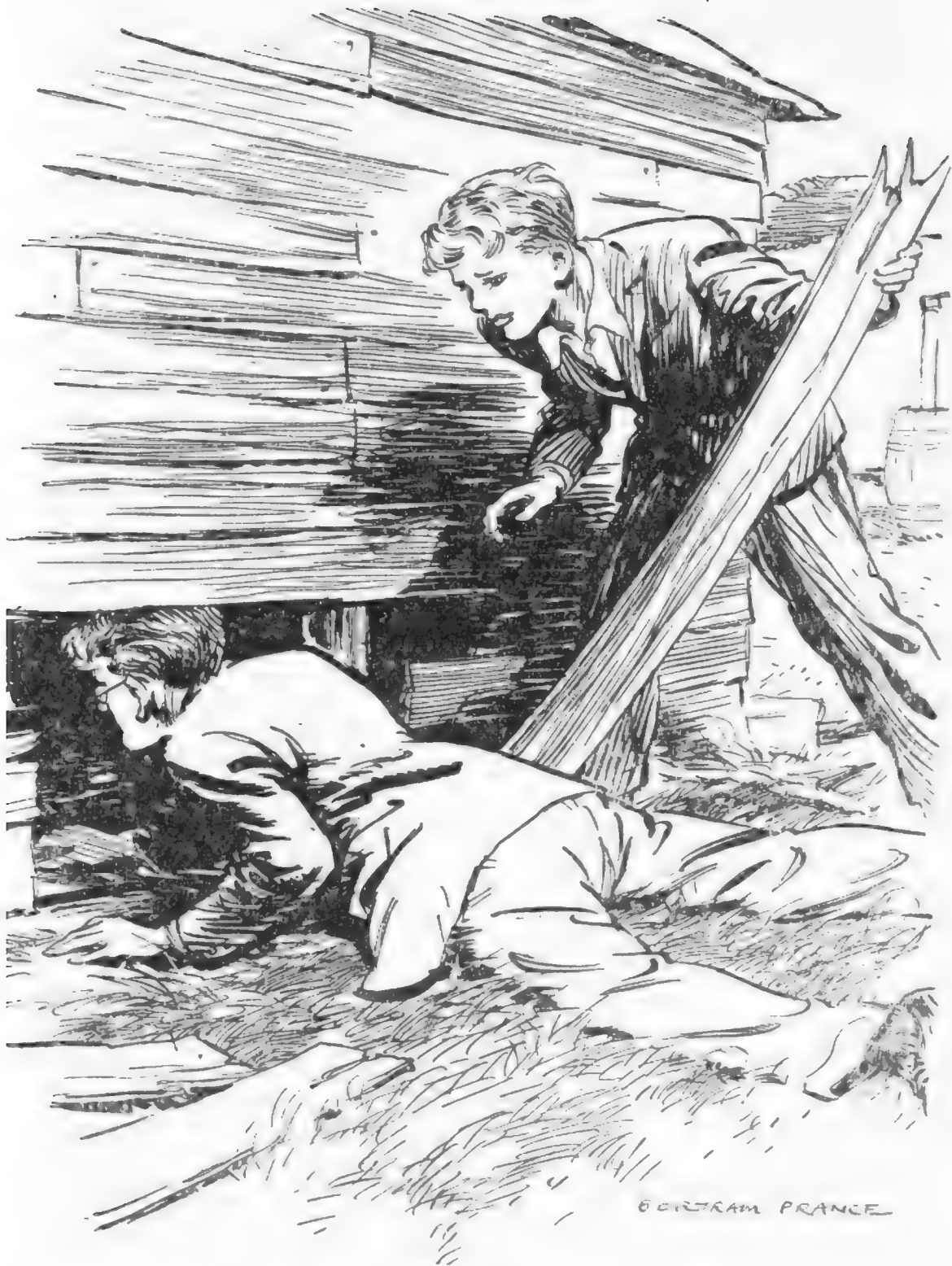
"We'll do it from here, then," David grinned. "Two of those wooden slats are loose at the side. I can loosen them still more with a knife. I've an idea we're on to something, and if we find Wilson I think we'll be forgiven for breaking in... Here goes!"

The rotting wood came away easily, and when three planks had been forced away Jon, flat on his stomach, crawled into the shed.

"Quick!" he called. "Wilson's on the floor. He's tied up and gagged."

David joined him and very soon Wilson was sitting up and rubbing his wrists and ankles.

"Very nice to see you, Jon," he muttered through bruised lips. "I can't think how you found me, but this is the second time I've been fooled and the second time you've pulled me out of a mess in the last few days. I'm not much the worse except for a fearful head; but before we go perhaps you'll tell me where I am and who this enterprising chap with the knife is? I could hear you talking and all I could do was to thump with my heels. I don't suppose you heard that."



THEY PULLED AWAY SOME ROTTING PLANKS AND JON CRAWLED
INTO THE SHED.

Jon introduced David and told him where he was.

"Of course. I came a cropper off my bike. It was dark and my lamp had been taken. I remember now. We've got to find the police or the coastguards, my lads, and quickly, too. I've no use for Mr. Banks' bicycle, so we'll leave it here. I must have hit something very hard because the front wheel is dented."

Wilson was faint and dizzy when he stood up outside and they waited for a few minutes for him to recover.

"Telephone," he said. "We must do that first and then I'll tell you everything. I'm thirsty, too."

Jon suggested that they walk back along the line to the Dungeness station behind the houses and use the telephone at the restaurant.

"I remember seeing one there, and you must tidy yourself up a bit. You'll feel better for a cup of tea, too. All you've got to do now is to follow us after we've made a dash for it, just in case that woman is watching from the back. We'll signal you over if it's all right."

Jon went first and then signalled David over. Wilson followed more slowly, but was much stronger by the time they reached the restaurant without further incident.

A man sitting at a table in the window looked up from his paper as they came in, but Wilson went over to the kitchen door and called to the woman without noticing him.

"May I use your telephone, please? It's very urgent. I want the police."

The stranger in the corner got up, crossed the room, brushed Jon and David aside and touched Wilson on the shoulder.

"Want the police, do you? Maybe the police want you. Are you James Wilson? Good! I'd be glad of a chat with you."

8. Penny Goes To Church

Wilson was either too tired or too dazed to show surprise when the stranger touched him on the shoulder.

"If you're trying to be funny, please don't," he said as he turned round, "but if you are a policeman I'd be glad if you'd prove it and then come and sit down while I eat and tell you a story. I've been tied up and put in a shed and-----"

Jon, who was watching the face of the woman in charge of the restaurant as she listened, thought it time to interrupt.

"Let's go over to that table in the window," he suggested. "No need to stand up here and argue."

The man glanced at him shrewdly and then smiled.

"You are James Wilson?" he repeated. "Good. Let's talk, then. This will prove that I am a police officer," and as they all sat down he showed them an official identity card.

"This saves me a lot of trouble," Wilson sighed as he rested his head in his hands. "I wish I could say that I feel in really robust health, but I don't... Jon, old chap, please order something to eat and drink and then I'll feel better... When the kitchen door is shut I'd like to talk; but I don't feel I can go anywhere else until I've had something to eat."

The detective's name was Rawlings and his most noticeable feature was a large and flowing moustache which was more unusual than decorative. He did not look at all like a policeman and was wearing a shabby tweed coat, old flannel trousers and brown shoes. He was slight in build and his voice was slow and quiet, but his eyes were bright and alert.

While they were waiting for their tea he passed his cigarette-case to Wilson and looked meaningly at the two boys.

"What are these lads doing here?" he said. "I know who you are and why you're down in this part of the world. You say you want me, and I certainly want to talk to you urgently, but I don't quite see where your two young friends come in. Will you explain?"

Wilson groaned and introduced them by name.

"I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for them. They've just rescued me from the most humiliating situation in which I've ever found myself, and I don't really know how they did it. Jon's mother runs the *Gay Dolphin* in Rye and I've been staying there for a bit----- Oh, you know that, do you? Do you know what I had for breakfast yesterday? I didn't have any breakfast to-day. David here is an old friend of Jon's and is staying with the Warrenders now. There's nothing I can tell you which they don't know, and I dare say they can tell you something you don't know. I promise you that we're all mixed up in this together... You know that I want the first story for my paper, don't you, Rawlings? Will you play fair with me if we help you?"

"I will - as long as you don't interfere with the course of justice and keep anything from me... Good! Here comes the food. Finish it quickly, because if someone else comes in here we shall have to go out, but I want your story quickly."

Wilson gulped his tea scalding hot, gasped and poured himself out another cup. Then he dealt with an egg on chips before either of the boys had started on theirs and looked up with a smile.

"That's much better," he signed. "Very much better. Now I'll tell you what I know."

Because he was a trained journalist he told his story quickly and clearly. Rawlings asked no questions, and merely nodded approval as he gave the facts, but he did show particular interest in each mention of Rattray. Wilson was generous in his praise of Jon and Penny and of what they had done to help him, and finished his story by saying:

"I suppose I was a fool to come along to this place on my own last night. All the same, you don't seem very excited about that chap swimming ashore

from the fishing-boat. It's true, you know. I didn't dream it. I'm sorry I was so clumsy and scared him off, but aren't you going to do something about it?"

Rawlings smiled as he filled his pipe.

"You saw what we've been expecting for a long time. We knew it was happening. It was Dungeness last night and it may be Dymchurch next week, but we shall get these chaps before long. What happened after you found your bicycle lamp was missing?"

Wilson fingered his still aching head.

"I wish I could remember. I'd made up my mind to find the coastguards and I just cycled off in the dark. I know I must have fallen off the bike, but I don't know how."

"We do," David said. "There was a wire stretched across the road between a telegraph post and a bungalow called *Channel View*. You rode into the wire and were thrown off, and then maybe somebody was waiting to hit you on the head once again."

"I think they must have done. I'm always being hit on the head."

"David found a green bike pump by the telegraph post and then the end of the wire," Jon said, and went on to tell of the woman with her story of her husband cycling to Lydd.

"Couldn't you get someone to arrest those two in *Channel View* now, sir?" David suggested. "Surely they would soon tell you everything they know?"

"I don't think they know very much, and, anyway, we'll get them when we want them. The fellow I'm interested in is that bird-watcher, Rattray. We'll watch him very carefully, and I must say here that you're all being very helpful. No doubt you realize that this is a very grave matter, and I'm afraid I cannot have you boys and your friends mixed up in this... But let's go now and then I think Mr. Wilson and I will have a look at that ruined school."

"We'll come, too," David said. "We've nothing else to do and we like to watch you sleuthing."

Rawlings got up.

"Maybe you do, my lad, but this time you'll do as I say. We'll soon find a job for you two, but you must remember that I'm trusting you with a great deal more than I should do."

Jon frowned as he followed the men out on to the deserted platform. The wind had dropped considerably now, but the sky was still overcast and he felt rather as if the adventure was over before it had started. It was so often like this when the grown-ups came in. It was not that Jon felt young - he was, indeed, just old enough to realize that something very precious and irreplaceable was slipping away from him - but this was something which a few had been sharing under his leadership and now it would never be the same again.

The two men were talking together at the end of the platform when Jon remembered the glass case of photographs.

"What a fool I am!" he said to David. "We can show this chap what Ballinger looks like. Penny found her in the background of one of these photos."

Rawlings was interested in this news, but when they examined the photographs on show Jon had to admit that the print he wanted was no longer there.

"It was there. No doubt of it. My cousin saw it first and called me. We're both absolutely certain that Miss Ballinger was in the background of that picture. I should recognize it again."

"I expect this photographer changes his pictures every few days," David remarked. "He'd be an idiot if he didn't if he's always taking new ones. It says here that his studio is at Dymchurch, and if the pictures weren't taken very long ago surely he'll still have the negative?"

"Quite right," Rawlings said. "Will you two boys make it your job to find that photograph for me? I'm certainly anxious to see a picture of your Miss Ballinger, for we may know her well, and you two could do this job just as well as we could... Get the print somehow and I'll come over to Rye to-night and collect it."

"That's all right," Jon agreed, "but I feel you're trying to get rid of us, and I don't like it. My friends won't like it either."

Wilson stepped forward and put his hand on Jon's arm.

"Don't feel like that, Jon. I still want all the help you can give me. I mean that. This business is too big now for amateurs and we should have had to tell the police some time. Rawlings is a grand chap, I'm sure, and I promise I'll persuade him to keep you all in it as closely as possible. He's very impressed with what you've done, but you must try and see things from his point of view... And thanks again, Jon, for pulling me out of that mess at *Channel View*. That was smart work... Now you two get off to Dymchurch and get that photograph. I expect I shall go back to *The Fishing Boat*, but I'll let you know where I am and what I'm doing, I promise... Give my love to Redhead and Arlette."

So David and Jon set off rather disconsolately for Dymchurch. There was no train, but they managed to get a lift in a baker's van as far as Romney, and from there they caught a bus. They were tempted to go into *The Fishing Boat* and see whether Ratray had collected his bicycle and whether the girls had managed to keep on his trail, but decided to do their own job first.

Dymchurch is a mixture of the very old and the very new. There are some really old beamed houses and inns in the village, and doubtless many of these were used by smugglers, but there is also a small bus station and a hideous Fun Fair. Opposite the latter was the photographer's small wooden lock-up shop. Both windows were displaying proofs of his industry, but Jon could not see the picture they wanted. When they tried the door it was locked.

"Of course, he's out somewhere taking his pictures of idiotic people leaning against engines," Jon said. "We'd better wait about until he comes back, I

suppose."

They wandered off down the street arguing about the advisability of going on to Hythe.

"He'd be more likely to take pictures of people at a terminus," David said. "There surely wouldn't be time to photograph people at the stations in between. I think we'd better go on to Hythe."

"And if he's not there we can come back here again," Jon interrupted, "and if he's not here go back to Dungeness. We can easily turn ourselves into a sort of shuttle service, can't we?"

David laughed. "Don't be so peevish, Jon. Before we decide what to do tell me if you recognize that girl sitting on the churchyard wall."

Jon stopped and polished his glasses. The church stood back about a hundred yards from the main road in a little churchyard with a path leading across it to the main porch on the south side. On the wall by the gate a pretty girl was sitting swinging her legs.

"That's Arlette. I'm sure it is. Where's Penny?"

David laughed. "We'd better ask her."

As soon as Arlette recognized them she jumped elegantly from the wall and tiptoed towards them with her finger on her lips.

"'Ullo!" she whispered. "Why do you come 'ere?"

"'Ullo to you," David whispered in return. "What are you doing here, anyway? Where's your victim?"

"And where's Penny?" Jon said.

Arlette shrugged. "She say her prayers," and just in case this was not understood she made her meaning clearer in pantomime. Then, "Sit on zis wall wiz me and I will tell you what we do... Ze little man, Rattray, is 'ere..."

"Where?" Jon demanded as he grabbed her arm. "What do you mean, Arlette? Where's Rattray and where's Penny?"

Arlette pouted and rubbed her bare arm.

"You will not listen to me. Penny is in ze church saying her prayers. For a long time she say them. Soon she will come out and I will go in and say my prayers."

"But where's Rattray?" David said slowly and distinctly. "Is he saying his prayers, too?"

"No! no! He is somewhere in zis place," and she waved her hands vaguely in the direction of the Fun Fair. "He keep on coming back 'ere because he want to be in the church by himself and we do not think he want to say his prayers. Sometimes he try to go in by the uzzer door, so one of us must be in the church all ze time. Then he get angry and go away, but soon we shall be tired," and after this lucid explanation she smiled at them charmingly and patted the top of the wall.

The wind was still high, but the little churchyard was very quiet and peaceful as Arlette continued her tale. They had, she said, had no difficulty in finding *Bella Vista* and had watched it from the pillar-box at the corner until Rattray had come out with camera, binoculars, map-case and haversack. They had followed him to the bus stop, got on to the same bus and followed him when he alighted midway between Hythe and Dymchurch. He had walked along the top of Dymchurch Wall, stopping every now and then and looking at birds through his binoculars. Arlette explained that because the tide was high and the sea rough in the high wind they could not walk along the sands, but had to follow him as naturally as possible along the top of the wall.

"Did he look at anything besides birds?" Jon asked.

"He look at a little fish-boat in the sea and then he speak to a man in a garden of a 'ouse be'ind ze wall quite close to this place... Oh! Here is Penny... 'Ullo, darling. Ze boys 'ave come to see us."

"No need to tell me that," Penny said. "I should think you could all be heard at the *Dolphin*... I couldn't go on saying my prayers with so much noise outside... Look at my nice knees... Look at them! They're all marked with the pattern of hassocks where I've been kneeling... What are you doing here, anyway? Have you given up already?"

Jon smiled down happily at his little red-headed cousin. She really was good fun and much better company than detectives and journalists.

"Nice to see you again, Newpenny. Truth is we can't trust you girls out of our sight. You'd better go on with the story now. Arlette had got to where Rattray had spoken to a man in a garden."

Penny sat down on the grass next to Jon.

"Keep a look-out for him from the wall, Arlette. It's time he was back again... Now, where were we? Oh, yes. We were following him along the wall... As soon as we realized that he was coming into the town we thought it might not be so suspicious if we caught him up and spoke to him. I knew that he'd seen us on the bus; he certainly saw us get off just after him, and as he looked back several times on the Wall he'd have been a fool if he didn't realize that we were following him. We caught him outside that old inn just across the road, and when he looked at us we just smiled in a most maidenly way and I asked him about birds..."

"Honestly, Jon and David, he does know about birds. I'm sure he does. Or he knows enough to talk about them. I don't think that he remembered that he'd seen us on Dungeness station - if he did he was very clever in disguising it. He was quite friendly and fatherly for a few minutes and then he tried to get rid of us. I thought he had something on his mind, and, like Dickie and Mary would have done, we stuck closer and closer to him. He began to get red in the face and said he wanted to examine the church, and I asked him if he knew about churches... Yes, he said, he did... So then I told him that Arlette was interested, too, and that we'd come with him so that he could explain to us both..."

Arlette, still on the wall, interrupted with a gay laugh.

"Oh, Jon! Penny was wonderful. He get angrier and angrier, and when he go into church we go, too... We 'ave been to zis church all day... Please to go on, Penny."

"Well, Jon, we soon realized that above everything else he wanted to be alone in this church. I'm sure he's looking for something, but we won't let him look. Every time he comes back and sees one of us outside he knows that when he goes in the other will be there, either wanting to be told about old churches or saying her prayers... He's been back three times. Last time he was so livid with rage that he offered me ten shillings if we'd go away. I just froze him with a look and sat tighter than ever, but although this may seem very funny to you it doesn't get us much further, does it? Maybe we ought to let him stay in there by himself and then follow him somewhere else-----"

"Queek! Queek!" Arlette squealed. "'E is coming down ze road now. Must I go back to the prayers?"

Jon decided instantly.

"You two girls go and meet him and say that you're now going home. Tell him any story you like, but be nice to him and keep him away from here for a few minutes while David and I hide inside and watch him."

"You idiots! There isn't anywhere to hide. We've looked."

"Queek!" Arlette whispered as she slid from the wall.

The girls ran off without more argument while David and Jon dashed for the church door. It was surprisingly light inside and at first glance there was nowhere to hide. Then David looked behind him and saw that the girls had not realized that there was a narrow gallery at the rear of the church, with a fine replica of the Royal Arms on the front. The stairs were behind a curtain and the boys ran up as quietly as they could and crouched on the floor in the front row. Unfortunately, although the front of this balcony was of wood, there were no cracks in it, and their only chance of watching Rattray was to risk peeping over the top. They had heard him come in and after a while, when Jon slowly raised his head, he saw the little man on his hands and

knees in the front pew. He bobbed down again and frowned warningly at David, whose lips were forming a question. He remembered that Rattray had been very interested in the church at Old Romney and there was little doubt now that he was looking for something. Perhaps a church in a district like this would be a good hiding-place, though? David was grinning at him again, so Jon nodded and his friend slowly raised his head over the top of the balcony. Then he turned and signalled for Jon to look with him.

Rattray was now sitting in the second pew with his back to them and bending over something on his knees. Every now and then he stuffed something into his jacket pocket, but neither of them could see what. They bobbed down again as he moved and very soon afterwards heard his footsteps on the stone floor and then the latch of the door as he went out.

"Give him a minute," Jon whispered. "We dare not let him see us, but I hope the girls follow him."

They stood back in the porch until they were sure that Rattray had reached the main street and then followed just in time to see the Hythe bus go by.

"Hope he didn't get on that bus," David said. "He could have done - just about... Here are the girls."

"He's on the Hythe bus," Penny panted. "We were watching from the Fun Fair, but he ran up just as it was moving and we didn't have a chance to catch him. Did he see you? Where did you hide?"

They took the girls back to the church and showed them the gallery.

"I could tear my hair out in shame," Penny said. "What a fool I am not to have realized there was a gallery up there... I'm sorry, Jon and David. Really I am. Did you see what he was doing? I bet he wasn't saying his prayers."

Jon shook his head and went on his own knees in the second pew. When he looked up he was triumphant.

"Here you are, chaps! Here's the secret. He's split open most of these hassocks with a sharp knife. We saw him stuff something into his pocket, so

I think we can be sure that we've found the way in which he collects something which is hidden for him - or for someone else - to find. The hassocks are used as collecting-boxes. I remembered just now that Wilson and I saw him searching the church at Old Romney the other day. We'd better tell our detective about this... Come on! Put the hassocks down, Penny."

"So you've got a detective of your own now, have you?" his cousin said. "We'd like to learn about him."

"Don't forget about Ballinger's photo," David reminded Jon. "That's our special job, and when we've settled that, Penny, we'll tell you everything we know."

"I nearly said that wouldn't take you long," Penny laughed, "but I remembered just in time that it would be what my house-mistress calls discourteous. Explain to us as we go, please."

The photographer's booth was now open and the man they had seen at Dungeness in charge. First Arlette bought the picture of herself by the engine *Hurricane* and ordered some more prints, and then Jon tried to explain what he wanted, making the excuse that the couple in the front of the picture were friends who had now gone away and had lost the numbered slip which the photographer had given them at the time.

"I shall recognize them, of course. They were taken at Dungeness and you were showing the print in your display there up to yesterday. Could I look through all you took on that particular day? My friends would be difficult to describe to you, but we rather thought the picture was spoiled by a stout woman in the background who didn't know she was being taken."

"That's rum!" the man behind the counter said. "Sounds like the same picture to me. What's going on round here, anyway?"

"Only my head," Penny murmured. "I'm faint with hunger."

"I don't know what you mean," Jon went on. "I *told* you that we've got to get that picture if you can help us. There's nothing going on."

"Yes, there is. I don't know what it is, but I suppose there's no reason why you shouldn't know that an elderly chap in a tweed suit came in here this morning after spotting that particular picture in the window. He said that the couple were related to him, too, but he bought the print and the negative as well. He gave me a good price for them. I don't know what you kids are playing at, but you're too late."

"I'm sorry about that," David said as soon as they were outside. "Rattray's been too smart for us, but I think it proves that there is an association between him and Ballinger. What shall we do?"

"Get on the next bus and get back to the *Dolphin*," Jon said. "Rawlings is calling later for the photograph, and then we'll tell him everything... I wonder how the twins are getting on?"

9. The Twins Find The Grasshopper

The wind was already very high when the twins, with Macbeth in his basket on the back of Mary's bicycle, rode out of Rye and on to the straight road leading across the Marsh. They had never been this way before, but Jon had given them the map and it was with some sense of responsibility that Dickie stopped in East Guldeford, which was the first village they reached, and called a council of war.

They leaned their bicycles against a gate while Macbeth, released from the indignity of his carriage, looked longingly at some sheep grazing near the church two hundred yards away.

"We shall have to spread this on the ground and then lie on it," Dickie said as he struggled with the map. "We'll never see it any other way unless we take it into the church. Let's make our plans now."

They managed to control it at last, but when they looked at it a second time - for the others had already briefed them before they left - it was clear that there was not much they could do except follow the road and keep their eyes open in the villages and at the farms, which would never be far from the roads.

"I like doing things like this on our own," Mary said, "and although I didn't say so, I think they've given us the best job of all... Can you really believe that Ballinger and Slinky are about again, twin? Somehow I can't believe that she would be as near to Rye as this place, and I can't think either that she'd be right in the country away from other houses and people. She's not like that."

"We don't know what she's like now except that her hair is a different colour," Dickie replied. "And we don't know what she's up to except that I bet that she's still greedy and cruel and I hate her. I don't think we've ever hated anybody as much as we hate her, do you, Mary?"

"It's stupid to hate people. It makes you feel awful inside and is very exhaustin'. I'd rather laugh at her. I wonder if she'll remember us?"

Dickie grinned wickedly as he started to fold up the flapping map.

"I think she will. And Mackie will remember, too. That girl Valerie knew us, didn't she?"

"Maybe we just *reminded* her of someone she had once met," Mary said dreamily. "I wonder if we shall ever have to disguise ourselves, Dickie. I'd like to try one day. I'd like to make myself absolutely *hideous* - more like you."

"You don't want to start anything like *that* with me," her brother advised as he stuffed the map in his pocket. "This is one of the days when I wish my twin was a boy... Come on! The wind is stronger than ever. Let's go while we don't have to pedal... Here, Mackie."

Sometimes the road was as straight as a ruler and sometimes turned sharply at right-angles. On each side of it a deep dyke of still, dark water bordered with bulrushes, now swishing and bowing in the wind, kept the sheep from straying. The light was strangely clear along the horizon, although the sky was overcast with tumbling clouds. There was little to see but this vast expanse of green dotted with white sheep - only miles away inland the line of low hills which marked the limit of the Marsh and which ran from Rye to Dore Street and on to Hythe.

There was nothing to stop the wind as it came roaring and blustering over the levels behind them. It sang in the telegraph wires overhead and tore at the branches of the few trees bordering the road until they bowed their proud heads in homage. Only the stubborn hawthorns stood firm against its force, but their shapes had already been tempered to its strength; since infancy they had turned their backs to it and their branches grew towards the north-east.

The twins sang as the wind drove their bicycles forward, and the wind snatched at their little voices, as it snatched at Mary's curls, and tossed the sound away into the immensity of marsh and sky.

There were few travellers over the Marsh this morning. Two farm lorries passed them and they met one of the familiar red buses going to Hastings. In the village of Brookland, where the belfry stands beside the church, they spent half an hour exploring, although this seemed to be a district for market gardens and hardly suggested Miss Ballinger. In the post office they bought two post cards and shamelessly asked the woman behind the counter if Mackie could have a drink of water and a biscuit.

"I wonder if you could help us to find someone we like very much," Mary said. "I'm sure you will if you can, because we can see how kind you are. Not everybody to-day is kind to little dogs. Some people are rude and impatient with dogs and shout at them... But *you're* kind. We like kind people... This is my brother, by the way. We're twins and staying in Rye..."

By now the unfortunate woman was nearly hypnotized. Never before had she seen children like these, although she had raised four herself! Dickie took up the tale then and explained that they had once had a governess who was very dear to them, and they had heard she had come to live on or near the Marsh. Between them they described Miss Ballinger very accurately, including the new red hair, but it was at once clear that she was not known in Brookland.

They thanked the bewildered post-mistress politely and cycled on, feeling rather pleased with their act. It was not far to Brenzett cross roads, where they turned sharp to the north towards Snargate and Dore Street. Now that they had changed direction the wind was no longer an ally, but thrust against their left sides and forced them across the road. After half a mile Mary jumped off at a farm gate and flung her bicycle on the ground.

"I loathe this beastly, horrible wind," she gasped with the tears drying on her cheeks. "I'd rather walk than do this. Now I know why those bullies made us go this way."

Dickie was glad to rest, too. He knew exactly how Mary was feeling.

"Let's rest for a bit. I vote we go up to this farm and ask for another drink."

There was an odd look about the farmhouse, for there were no curtains in the windows, and although the front door was open the place appeared to be deserted. The farmyard lay behind the house, but the drive was neglected. Mackie approached with his tail between his legs, as if he, too, sensed the depression which hung about this lonely dwelling.

Mary reached for her twin's hand, which she did only at times of great stress or anxiety.

"I don't like this, Dickie. Let's go back."

"We can't now. There's a woman staring at us from the dark hall. I'm not going to run away. There's no harm in asking for a drink, is there?"

It was not the first time the twins had faced a situation together when they were both afraid of the unknown, but when they discussed it afterwards neither of them could decide why they were so scared.

The woman came out to meet them. She was shabby and untidy and wearing an old-fashioned pinafore over a black dress. Her hands, fingering a brooch at her neck, were worn with work and her eyes were red-rimmed with weeping.

"What do you want?" she whispered. "There's nobody here but me. I thought you were the men come to take everything away."

For a moment the children stared at her in silence. Then Mackie's tail moved slightly and Mary's fear was replaced by pity.

"I'm sorry if we disturbed you," she said as she released her twin's hand and smiled, "but we wanted a drink, and this is a very lonely place round here."

"Excuse me saying so," Dickie added, "but you don't look very happy. Can we do anything to help? We've got practically the whole day, although this wind makes cycling more difficult."

At these two unexpected speeches the woman smiled shakily.

"You liddle oddities," she said. "Come inside and welcome, though there's nothing much left. Come you in and help yourselves."

She led them through the hall, where a lot of furniture was piled against the wall, into a stone-flagged kitchen which was in a state of astonishing confusion. Piles of crockery and china were spread over the floor and remnants of food on the chairs, while a great oak dresser and a cupboard against the wall were empty. A kettle was singing on an old-fashioned range and a teapot standing beside it.

"Help yourselves," the woman said as she leaned against the dresser. "You're welcome to what there is before they come."

Mary took charge.

"Now you sit down here, but not on the butter, and I'll make a nice cup of tea for us all. You look quite tired out and not at all happy. Perhaps we can cheer you up. We're quite good at that."

The woman did as she was told and soon all three of them were sipping tea which Mary made. Perhaps it was because she was alone and unhappy, or just because these attractive children had shown her kindness, that she began to talk as she sat there, staring over their heads, and sipped her tea. They did not understand all that she said, but it was clear that only a short while ago her husband had died suddenly, leaving many debts which could only be settled if she sold up her beautiful furniture and left the farm where she had lived all her married life. Now, at any moment, the men were coming to take away her home before she went off to live for a time with a married sister at Ashford.

"And no doubt I've been robbed. She drove a hard bargain did that bit of a girl. I hope she won't come here again, although 'tis true they paid me the money they promised... All in notes, it was, too."

Mary's spoon clattered on the stone floor.

"We're most frightfully sorry about this. Really we are. We wish we could help. It wouldn't be any good if we asked our father to buy your furniture,

would it? Not now, I mean, 'cos it's sold."

"Where's it going?" Dickie said, so abruptly that he sounded almost rude.

"'Tis going to a place at Dore Street. Some outlandish name I forget. They're coming for it to-day. As soon as they've gone I'll be going, too. I'll be locking up for the last time and walking up the road to the station for the last time. I'll never come back. Never no more."

And while she was fussing again with her handkerchief they whispered "Good-bye" and ran out of the house and down the weed-grown track to the road and their bicycles. Mackie was almost pushed into his basket as they mounted and with heads down pedalled hard against the wind. Each knew what the other was thinking. Each knew that they had stumbled on a clue that must be followed up - the buying of second-hand furniture, the girl Valerie at Hastings and now the news of such a business in Dore Street on the edge of the Marsh - and there was no need to waste words.

They battled through the village of Snargate, which was not much more than a big church, a small inn and a row of unhealthy-looking cottages. The wind dropped a little and they made better progress and came to Dore Street Station and a level crossing. They rested here because they could now see the village on the hill not far away, and it was while they were sitting under the hedge that they heard a lorry rumbling down the road towards them.

"It looks like a small furniture van," Dickie said. "But there's no name on the front. Look carefully as it passes."

Two men with white aprons were in the driving-seat, but there was no lettering on the side of the van - only a painted reproduction of a strange-looking insect.

"What's that?" Mary said. "It looked to me like a grasshopper. How very peculiar."

"That's it. A grasshopper... I believe Jon said something about a grasshopper when he was telling us his story, but I can't remember what it was... Anyway, I bet that was the furniture van, and as we know where it's going,

let's go on now to the village. It's funny to see a hill in this part of the world."

They cycled on comfortably until the road turned sharply to their left, and then the wind was dead against them and they were forced to get off and walk. On their right now was a long belt of trees bordering a canal, and here they decided to stop and eat their sandwiches.

"Come on! Let's leave our bikes here and find a place under the trees," Dickie suggested.

"We shall have to gain some strength, Dickie," Mary replied as she scrambled up the bank. "Just suppose we're really lucky enough to find the Ballinger... Come on, Mackie! It's only a frog or something that plops. You're not to go in the water."

They sat against a tree and munched in silence. The waters of the canal were serene except when a fish broke the surface and sent out a widening ring of ripples, but above them the branches of the trees roared and threshed in the wind. They had cycled a long way, and so it was not surprising that, just for a few minutes when they had finished their lunch, they both dozed a little.

They were wakened by the barking of Macbeth.

Mary sat up and grabbed her twin.

"Where is he, Dickie? That's his worried bark. *Mackie! Come here, Mackie!*"

They were both on their feet when the little dog came dashing along the path towards them. Mary stooped to pat him, but he barked again and turned back the way he had come.

"He's found something," Dickie said. "All right, Mack. We'll come."

They followed him for fifty yards along the path and then he dashed under some bushes and began to yelp again.

The twins looked at each other and then, on hands and knees, followed him. Dickie was in front, and when he saw what Macbeth had found he stopped short with a horrible tight feeling in his throat. Then he pulled Mary forward just as Macbeth, with a little whine, began to lick the face of a girl lying on the ground under a tree.

She stirred a little under his caress and with a sickening sense of relief Dickie noticed that she was breathing, although she did not seem to want to wake up. As they got to their feet and moved forward they noticed that her face was cut and bruised and streaked with tears. One stocking was torn and by her dress they guessed her to be a country girl of about fifteen.

Mary grabbed Macbeth and lifted him in her arms.

"Get some water, Dickie. She's hurt. She's fainted. We must splash water over her."

Dickie had nothing in which he could bring water, but he did his best with a rather grubby handkerchief, which he dipped in the canal. This proved effective, for with a funny sort of gasp the girl sat up suddenly and stared at them.

Mary spoke first. "Are you all right now? You frightened us. Our dog found you first and brought us here."

The girl smoothed her rather ugly red dress and then put a hand to her straight hair and winced when it touched the bruise on her forehead.

"You funny kids," she said. "You're just alike. You're twins."

"We know that, thank you," Dickie said. "But what's happened to you? Have you had an accident? Are you all right now? We'll help you if you like."

The girl stood up and tried to pull her stocking straight.

"Where you come from? I ain't see you around afore," and then, even as she was speaking so ungraciously, a rush of colour came to her pale cheeks.

"I remember now," she went on. "I've run away. I'll never go back no more. Never! Never! She hit me with a strap and I run off. I come here first to hide for a bit and felt that bad I reckon I went to sleep."

"Do you live up there in Dore Street?" Mary asked.

"No, o' course I don't. I lives with my auntie in Rye. I only works here for Miss Saunders, but never no more I won't."

The twins glanced at each other and then Dickie produced a packet of rather soft chocolate and passed it over with one of his winning smiles.

"Have a bit of this," he invited. "Have it all. We've just had our sandwiches. Honestly we have! Sit down and enjoy the chocolate. What's your name?"

Whether it was the twins' charm or the chocolate they never knew, but suddenly the unhappy girl thawed to them and her eyes filled with tears as Dickie pressed the chocolate into her hand.

Mary flopped down on the grass and pulled Macbeth to her.

"Sit down with us," she said, "and if you like, tell us all about this horrible woman and we'll help you if we can. We can keep a secret. We're staying in Rye for a holiday and have just come out for a bike ride... If you *can* spare a scrap of chocolate Mackie loves it, although it's not very good for him... Say thank you, Mackie darling."

The girl sat down again and laughed as Mackie licked the chocolate from her fingers and from that moment they were all friends.

Her name was Judith. She was an orphan and her only home was with a kindly uncle and aunt in Rye. For the last two months she had been working as a maid with a Miss Saunders, who ran a second-hand furniture business in a big house in Dore Street.

"Seems silly to me," she went on, "but it isn't like proper shop. All the furniture is inside in different rooms. I hates Miss Saunders. From the very

first minute I hated her slippery ways and her grand manner and her goings on."

"What's she like to look at?" Mary said in a very, very small voice.

Judith described Miss Ballinger with her short-sighted eyes and her new red hair, and went on to explain that this morning she had picked up a strap off a packing-case and beaten her because she had been in her private office - something which was strictly forbidden.

"I run out after I told her what I think of her," she went on, not very convincingly, "but I'll never go back. Never. Why shouldn't I go in her stuffy little office, anyway?"

Wildly excited now, the twins had no difficulty in persuading her to go on talking, although they could not be sure whether everything she said was truthful. She told them that furniture was always coming and going and that although the village was a small one many people in big cars came to see Miss Saunders. Sometimes, she said, people came at night, and sometimes Miss Saunders had big parties. And when Mary asked whether Miss Saunders - she nearly said Miss Ballinger - did all this by herself she said:

"No, not her. She's too lazy. There's the girl, Miss Valerie, and she's as stuck-up as her fat old aunt. I hates her, too, but she tried to make me stay just now when I ran off. She'll have to soil her fingers now, she will."

Judith was enjoying her story so much that Dickie, who could not think of a subtle way of inquiring about Slinky, decided to take a risk and said, "Is it all English people who come to see her? Has she got any foreigners helping her? I b'lieve foreigners are good at furniture."

"Americans come, and there's a nasty little man with a black moustache who pops up unexpected sometimes. He's daft, I reckon, because when he's with Miss Saunders or Miss Valerie he speaks English like you and me, but if others is there he speaks some other language."

Mary, who for some minutes now had hidden her face in Macbeth's shaggy coat so that the unsuspecting Judith should not see her excitement, looked

up at this stupendous news and said:

"We'd like to see this place. Has it got Miss Saunders' name on it? "

"O' course it 'asn't. Didn't I say? It's quite daft, but it's called The Grasshopper."

Dickie broke a long silence and his voice was shaking when he got up and said, as casually as he could, "We'll have to be getting on with our bike ride now, Judith. We wish you luck with your running away."

"That's O.K. Don't you worry about me. I feel fine now. I'll just wait about at the corner till the Rye bus comes and tell my auntie everything, and she won't send me back... Cheerio, you two, and thanks a lot for the chocolate."

Then Mary had a sudden idea.

"If you go to the *Gay Dolphin Hotel* in Trader's Street and ask Mrs. Warrender if you could work there, I'm sure it will be all right... Really and truly, Judith. We're sure. She'll help you 'cos she's so kind and nice... Good-bye."

They whistled for Mackie and then, as casually as they could, left Judith and went back to the track by the canal where they performed a silent war-dance of triumph. Then they scampered back to their bicycles.

"We must go and spy at once," Dickie said. "There must be somewhere near the house where we can watch."

"P'raps we could go right in and try to buy something? I'd love to see Ballinger again and pretend we don't know her."

Eventually they decided to hide their bicycles in the bushes by the canal, but in a place where they could get them easily. Having done this, they walked boldly into the village up a steep, short hill and found themselves at the end of a wide and gracious street. On their right the church was hidden behind some trees, and when they turned to look behind them the

immensity of the Marsh reminded them of the view of it from the wall at the end of Trader's Street in Rye.

They found the house named *The Grasshopper* without much difficulty at the far end of the street on the left. It was a beautiful house of warm red brick, with a central porch and tall windows, whose frames were painted white. It stood back at least a hundred yards from the road with some trees and shrubs in front of it. A semicircular drive with two gates swung round in a gentle curve to the front door, which was wide open. Only a hanging sign on which was painted a golden grasshopper on a green ground suggested that the Morton twins had once again solved a problem which was worrying a great many grown-ups.

When they looked in at the gates the drive was deserted, and although Dickie wanted to go straight in his twin restrained him.

"No, Dickie. Let's watch what happens. We'll go in presently, but it's still early, and if we wait long enough the wind may drop for our ride back. Anyway, Judith said there was a bus to Rye, so we could go back that way and leave the bikes until to-morrow. I think we ought to do some real spyin'... Take notes and things so that we can give those big bullies a proper report... Mackie darling, behave yourself."

Macbeth seemed strangely uneasy and was growling softly as he stood between them, but he calmed down when they crossed the street to the post office and general stores almost opposite. Here they bought two bottles of brightly-coloured mineral water and four packets of potato crisps and retired to a seat under an elm tree, from where they could watch the drive to *The Grasshopper*.

They were very tired and did not say much as they dipped grubby fingers into the bag of crisps and munched contentedly. Macbeth lay at their feet licking up the crumbs which came his way. Those who passed by smiled at them and Dickie was beginning to get impatient when the furniture van came back and turned into the drive.

"I'd forgotten that," Mary said. "Shall we go and watch them unload?"

"Here's something else," her twin replied excitedly. "I remember this car."

From the opposite direction came a smart little black car, with the pretty Valerie at the wheel, which swept into the drive behind the van.

"All we want now is dear Slinky," Mary said as she licked her salty fingers. "I don't think much of that pink stuff we've been drinking, twin. It's made me feel very large and peculiar inside... Shall we go over and see what they're doing?"

"I think we might hide in those bushes for a bit," Dickie said. "I'd like to really *see* Ballinger for certain before we go in. If we wait long enough I should think she'll come to the front door. It would be better to see her first that way - before we go in, I mean."

If either of them realized that they were doing something extremely foolish in going into *The Grasshopper* and deliberately meeting a woman who bore them a very strong grudge and would certainly remember them, they did not remark upon it. They did not have to tell each other that their hearts were banging uncomfortably with excitement and not a little fear, and neither of them even considered suggesting that now that they had found *The Grasshopper* they should go back and report their success to the others and do no more. That would have been an easy way out. They were much too proud of each other and their team-work to leave a job half done, and they had already arranged that when they did meet Ballinger and Valerie they would pretend that they had never seen either of them before.

So without a word Mary stooped and clipped on Mackie's lead, and then they strolled across to the drive gates. As they went in at one end the van went out at the other, but Valerie's empty car remained just by the front door. As soon as they were in the gates they dashed into the shrubs, and forcing Mackie down between them, lay on their stomachs amongst the dry and dusty leaves. The cover was not very good, but it was unlikely that anyone approaching the house would notice them, and they hoped they could not be seen from the windows. Soon after a large car drove in and two expensively-dressed women and a man got out. Their voices were loudly American, and although they went straight in nobody came to the door to

greet them. After a quarter of an hour they came out with what looked to be a picture, and drove off.

"Now let's go in," Dickie whispered. "I can't stick this waiting any longer. We've seen enough now."

Just as they were standing in the drive brushing the leaves and some of the dirt from their knees a cyclist came in quickly from the road and swerved violently to avoid them.

"You ought to ring your bell," Mary said severely. "That was really very dangerous of you!"

The cyclist was a little man in a grey tweed suit and a shapeless hat to match. Round his neck hung a leather case for field-glasses and the sort of flattish tin case carried by naturalists. He had put on his brakes sharply, and as he dismounted clumsily he glared at them and said:

"Ridiculous and stupid children! Go away! You have no business here. This is a private house."

The twins glanced at each other happily.

"Nonsense!" Mary said. "It's a shop - a sort of furniture shop, and we're going to buy something. And what's it to do with you, anyway? We're not ridiculous nor stupid."

"Does this Grasshopper belong to you?" Dickie added, "and even if it does, why don't you ring your bell before you come *hurtling* about the roads like that? You were cycling in a very dangerous way, and I expect you could be taken to a police station for nearly running us over like that. Shall we go and fetch a policeman, Mary?"

Mr. Rattray was tired - *very* tired. He had cycled a long way in a gale and he was scared, agitated and very bad-tempered. His rather pasty face went blotchy and he forgot that he was a gentle-mannered naturalist, interested only in the wonders of the bird and insect world.

"Get out of here!" he screamed, and very foolishly aimed an ineffectual sort of slap in the direction of Mary's head. Before he had time to recover his balance Macbeth's teeth were worrying at his trousers and his bicycle had fallen against his legs.

"Pull him off," Dickie said to his twin, and then to Rattray, "You silly, rude old man. If you do that again our dog might easily kill you."

Growling and snarling, Macbeth was pulled away from his victim, who scowled and then walked up to the front door, where he left his bicycle leaning against a pillar and went straight in. The twins followed him without a word.

They walked into a wide and spacious hall. Beautiful furniture gleamed against the white panelled walls and somewhere not far away they could hear voices. On a table near the door was a little bell with a ticket inviting visitors to ring for attention.

Mary accepted the invitation boldly and then seconds later they were once again facing the hated Miss Ballinger.

"What do you children want?" she began. "This is not a shop... and then she recognized them. They knew that she recognized them because they had their backs to the light while she was facing it, and they could see a flicker of recognition behind the thick glasses. The tone of her voice changed, too, and a dull flush rose to her flabby cheeks. She had not altered much except that her hair was now a carrot red and she was very much better dressed; but Macbeth knew her at once and began to growl. Mary scooped him up into her arms and with a thumping heart answered her.

"We know it's not a *proper* shop, thank you. Someone outside told us that, but please may we come in and look round? We want to buy a present for our Mum-----"

"Just some little thing," Dickie broke in as he pushed past the great bulk of Ballinger into a big gallery full of furniture on the left of the hall. "But don't worry, 'cos we've got some money... This is a very beautiful house, isn't it?... Very nice indeed."

Mary followed him. Miss Ballinger followed them, and her voice was shaking when she said, "I've nothing here for you children. Nothing at all. Everything is too expensive. You must go at once..."

Then she stepped between them and the long window and said, "Surely I have seen you two before?"

Mary edged away, but looked her straight in the face.

"Once we had our picture in the paper. We're twins, you see... I'm sorry about our dog being so naughty. He's not used to grand houses like this."

Miss Ballinger looked puzzled and then moved quickly to the open door and called: "Val! I wish you'd come here. We've some visitors I'd like you to meet. Close the front door on your way."

While they had been munching crisps the twins had decided that somehow or other they were going to see as much as they could of the inside of *The Grasshopper*. Having run Miss Ballinger and Valerie to earth was not enough, and although they knew how dangerous the former could be, they were fairly certain that bluff and cheek would carry them through and that there was nothing under the circumstances which she could do to harm them. All that they had seen so far confirmed that here was a genuine second-hand furniture business, although it did seem strange that so large an establishment should be run from so small and isolated a place. But they did not like the edge to her voice when she called "Val," nor the way in which she moved in front of the door to the hall.

After that a lot of things happened very quickly. There was a light step in the hall and Valerie came in. She was carrying a large cat in her arms and, as usual, a cigarette was smouldering between her painted lips.

"These children want something for their Mum," Miss Ballinger said. "We'd like to help them, wouldn't we? They remind me of twins we met once before."

There was a horrid, silky menace in her voice as she spoke and Valerie's lovely eyes opened very wide as she recognized the twins. She closed the

door behind her and the cat jumped out of her arms. With a snarl of rage Macbeth struggled from Mary's hold and leaped into battle. The cat howled and bolted for cover with Mackie, yapping loudly, close behind her. Valerie screamed and Miss Ballinger cursed while Dickie and Mary called the dog in vain. The cat squeezed behind a big grandfather clock against the wall and Mackie tried to follow. Miss Ballinger dashed forward just as the clock swayed and toppled forward and fell across a china cabinet. There was a clash of breaking glass as the front of the clock swung open and hundreds of tiny tissue-wrapped packets poured on to the floor. The cat sprang to safety up the window curtain while Macbeth barked defiance from below, but the two grown-ups and the two children stared at the litter on the floor.

Then the twins saw that the force of the fall had broken some of the tissue wrappings through which came the bright gleam of gold. Dickie stepped forward instinctively and moved one with his foot.

"They're watches!" he whispered to Mary. "Millions and millions of gold watches!... Quick! Let's get out."

They dashed for the door, but Valerie was quicker.

"Get 'em downstairs!" Miss Ballinger snapped. "They know too much... George! Help to get these kids in the cellar."

George was the man in the grey tweed suit, who had been lurking somewhere in the background, and three grown-ups were too much for the twins, who fought and struggled in vain. Mackie fought, too, but he could not do much on the steep stairs leading down to the cellar, so when the door was slammed on his beloved master and mistress he raced up again and barked defiance from the hall.

Miss Ballinger's voice, when she could find enough breath to speak, shook with rage and she sank into a chair.

"Get that clock up, George, and you pick up the watches, Val, *and do something about that dog*, one of you."

The twins had left their mark on all three of the grown-ups, who were obviously very shaken by the events of the last few minutes. From below came shouts and thuds, while Macbeth, his fighting spirit undaunted, dodged to and fro and snapped at their ankles.

Suddenly Miss Ballinger lost her nerve. Clumsily she climbed on her chair.

"George!" she yelled. "You miserable old coward. Kill that dog!"

He looked at her blankly as he stood among the welter of watches on the floor. Then Macbeth bit Valerie on one of her silk-clad ankles, and she turned and cursed him and poor George Rattray, too.

"Kill that dog!" Miss Ballinger gasped. "Do something, George, or I'll do something about you... Stop it making that noise... *Kill it!*"

Rattray leaned forward and picked up a heavy stool and Macbeth stopped barking. Then he growled and backed warily towards the window. Another burst of shouting and thuds came from below as Rattray rushed forward and flung the stool with all his strength at the little black dog. There was a crash of glass as the stool hurtled through the window and an exclamation of fury from Miss Ballinger as Macbeth jumped through the broken gap and ran off down the drive.

10. Arlette And Wilson

When Jon and David and the girls got back to Rye that same afternoon there was, of course, no sign of the twins. The four of them felt particularly depressed as, although they had confirmed that Rattray was using the Marsh churches for some unusual purpose, they had not been able to follow him back to Hythe, nor had they succeeded in getting the photograph of Miss Ballinger for which they had been specially asked. They also felt that, in spite of Wilson's encouragement, Rawlings was keeping them out of the way.

Arlette in particular did not like the weather either. The others were more used to gales at the end of the summer, but as they trudged up Trader's Street together and the wind roared over the rooftops and blustered down the street, bringing with it a flurry of stinging rain, the French girl thought longingly of bright sunshine and skies as blue as the Mediterranean seas which she usually saw at this time of year.

They went into the *Dolphin* for tea and were not surprised when Mrs. Warrender asked about the twins.

"When will they be back, Jon? I don't think you ought to have let them go off by themselves in a strange place and in this weather."

"They won't be long, Mother. They're all right. You know how they like doing things on their own, and they're well able to look after themselves."

"Where have they gone?"

"Exploring on their bikes. Over the Marsh."

"In this wind? You all must be crazy. You really must promise me not to allow them to go off like that on their own again. I think you might remember that I am responsible for you all, David... Now I shall worry until they come back."

David, rather red in the face, got up and began to apologize, but Mrs. Warrender merely nodded and said, "Let me know as soon as they come in, please," and left the room.

"Let's go outside and look for them," Penny said gloomily. "I don't want to be here when your mother comes back again and asks, Jon... They couldn't come to any harm, could they? I s'pose you were right to send them off on their own, Jon? I can't see how they'll ever cycle back across the Marsh in this wind."

Jon was thinking the same. He was just wishing that he had some contact with Wilson, whose car would be very useful to them just now, when Penny led the way outside and he followed with the others. They leaned on their wall and looked at the strange line of light along the horizon over the sea - strange because the rest of the sky was still overcast with heavy, rushing clouds.

"That means bad weather," Jon said. "I've seen it like that before."

"Bad?" Arlette shrugged. "Is not this bad, then? What we 'ave now, I mean. Do you call this good weather? I do not like this wind. I like the sun."

"So do we," Penny almost snapped as she turned round. "Who's this, I wonder?"

A few paces away, standing under the swaying sign of the *Dolphin*, was a dark-haired girl of about fifteen in a shabby red frock. Her face was dirty and her stockings torn, and she looked forlorn, miserable and nervous.

Penny, the kind-hearted, stepped forward.

"You look lost. Are you waiting for somebody?"

"I was to ask for Mrs. Warrender. She runs this place, don't she?"

"Mrs. Warrender is my aunt. This is her hotel. Who told you to ask for her? There's no need to look so scared."

"Two kids looking just the same. I was talking to them down by the canal up Dore Street."

Penny took her by the arm and led her firmly over to the others.

"Don't you worry. We'll help you. Those twins belong to us, so will you please tell us exactly what happened and where they are now, and then I'll take you in to Mrs. Warrender."

It was not often that Judith found herself the centre of attraction, and once she had recovered from her shyness she told them her story willingly enough and explained that she thought she should try to get another job before she went to her aunt and confessed that she had run away from Miss Saunders.

"What you've told us is very important, Judith, and we'll do all we can to help you. Did the twins say where they were going?"

"Not as I remembers. They went off in a tearing hurry, but I reckon they wanted to see the Grasshopper... Come to think of it, they were sort of excited about it - like you are - but I can't see why... Will you come and help me with Mrs. Warrender, miss?"

When Penny rejoined the others after pleading Judith's case with her aunt, Wilson had arrived in his car.

"Hullo, Redhead," he smiled as he got out and stretched. "Are you pleased to see me, and are we still friends?"

Penny was excited enough now to be in a very good humour, so she folded her hands over her heart and glanced up at him under fluttering lashes.

"James!" she whispered. "Of course I'm pleased. If you ask Arlette she'll tell you that I've been talking about you all day... Now do tell us why you've come back so suddenly?... If it's me you've come to see, don't tell anyone but me..."

"We've got plenty of news for you," David broke in, "and precious little time to waste. Don't take any notice of that hussy... Where shall we talk? Indoors or out?"

"No need to go in," Jon said. "We shall want your car, Mr. Wilson. The twins seem to have found Ballinger in Dore Street, but they haven't returned, and they'll never cycle back against this wind. Have you any message from Rawlings? We couldn't get the photograph. Rattray had been there before us and bought the prints and the negative."

Wilson moved over to the wall and the others crowded round him.

"Bad luck about the photo, but good news about Ballinger. I left Rawlings half an hour ago in Romney. He wants us all to lie low to-night, as the friendly couple who tripped me up and then tied me up at *Channel View* have been arrested. Apparently they've confessed that another consignment of smuggled goods is coming into Dungeness to-night. Rawlings seems to think that once they can catch the actual smugglers red-handed and keep the whole affair as quiet as possible they'll stand a better chance of rounding up the distributors... If this about your twins and Ballinger is true, he'll want to know quickly, and maybe I ought to go back at once and tell him - if I can find him... He's promised to let me in on everything later so that I can get my story. He's a good chap."

"But we must go to Dore Street and find the twins," David said. "You do see that you're the only person who can help us, Mr. Wilson? I'm responsible for them to my mother and father, and Mrs. Warrender is already asking awkward questions. Will you take us right away, please?"

Wilson rubbed his chin reflectively.

"It would want a furniture van to take you all and bring the twins and their bicycles back here. My car is only a two-seater, but I agree that we ought to go."

"Thanks. That's fine," Jon said. "Go and get a coat, Penny, and tell Mother we shan't be long. Just say we've gone to collect the twins and don't give her time to ask questions."

"Just a minute, young man. You can't all go, because there isn't room, and surely Miss Ballinger - if you do happen to find her and wish to spy on her - knows Jon and Penny. Of course, she'd recognize you both... No, I'll take David, so that he can look after his precious twins, and Arlette as very pleasant company. No arguing, Penny. You must see the sense of this... Are you coming, Arlette? Good. If you want a coat run for it... Now, Jon, if we're not back in two hours' time, ring the New Romney Police Station and insist on a message being taken to Rawlings. Tell him exactly what has happened, what you know and where we've gone... Sorry not to take you two, but your job is here this time. By the time we're back with the twins there might well be some exciting developments."

"I don't suppose I shall ever forgive you for this, James," Penny said. "I really thought we were friends, and now you've just tossed me aside like an old glove... Look after Arlette and bring the twins back as soon as you can... Good luck!"

When the car turned at the end of Trader's Street and David and Arlette looked back the two Warrenders were still standing under the sign of the *Dolphin* with their arms raised in farewell.

Although the wind was not as strong as it had been in the morning, squalls of rain were now beating a tattoo on the roof of the little car. Soon after Brenzett, in the gloom of an early dusk, they met a cyclist, pedalling furiously with head down, towards Romney, and although they were travelling very fast David was quite confident that the man was Rattray.

"He looked as if he'd had enough, too. I hope they get him without much trouble. He seems a poor type to me."

On the outskirts of Dore Street, just where the road ran alongside the canal, Wilson switched on his headlights and David suddenly yelled, "Stop!"

Before the car slithered to a standstill he jumped out and ran back along the road shouting something which they could not hear over his shoulder. Wilson switched off the engine.

"That was odd," he said. "I thought I saw something on the road, but wasn't sure... Let's go and see."

They met David running back with a frantic, struggling Macbeth in his arms. The little dog was whining with joy and trying to lick his master all over, and when they got back into the car he jumped over them all, crying and lashing his tail. He was dirty, wet and bedraggled and one paw had a deep cut on it, but otherwise he seemed to be all right.

"I thought I saw him at the side of the road," David explained, "but couldn't be sure... I don't like the look of this. He'd never leave the twins unless he was forced to do so. He's been in the wars, too... All right, old chap. Take your dirty feet off Arlette's coat. She doesn't want you."

"But I do not mind, Daveed. I like him a lot. He is very chic."

"I don't think that's the right word to describe him," David said, "but he may help us to find those two. Let's go right into the village, park the car and ask for this Grasshopper place."

The Grasshopper was easy to find, so they left the car just off the road by the elm tree under which the twins had munched crisps only a few hours ago, and then went up the drive together.

The windows were now heavily shuttered and the front door closed, but a few gleams of light proved that the house was not deserted. It was quiet except for the sound of the wind in the trees and whines and growls from Mackie, who seemed very agitated.

"The glass of that window in the front is smashed," Wilson remarked.

"Maybe that's why the shutters are drawn so early. Now what are we going to do? Do you think that if Ballinger recognized the twins - as I suppose she would be sure to do - she'd lock them up, David? Surely she wouldn't be so crazy?"

"She might if they had found out something important. She hates us and the last time we met, Jon and I rescued the twins and Penny from a bungalow when the sea was coming up through the floor... Same sort of night as this,

too... She locked them in deliberately then. She might do it again but she's not a fool, and I think she'd only do so if she was scared that they had found out too much. What do you suggest?"

"I've got an idea. You and the dog patrol the house from *outside*, searching for any clue to the twins. Mackie may be able to help there or you might hear them... While you're doing that Arlette and I will ring the door bell and say that we've come a long way to see some furniture... Do you understand what we have to do, Arlette? Do you mind coming with me or would you rather go with David?"

"... Oh, no. I like Daveed but it is better he go wiz Mack... I come wiz you. What is that we pretend? Perhaps it better if we say we are affianced, yes?"

Wilson looked a little startled at this brilliant idea and hoped that he was not too slow in welcoming it with enthusiasm.

"Thank you very much, Arlette. I'm very honoured. It will not be at all difficult for me to pretend... What we have to do is to make sure that this woman Saunders, or Ballinger, is really here and then look out for any sign of these twins. All that we're interested in is furniture for our future home. Do you understand?"

Arlette giggled. "Yes. I understand ver' well. I like this excitement ver' much, but it makes me feel ver' funny inside," and she placed her hands elegantly over her stomach.

Wilson stopped smiling and put his hand on her arm.

"I do not think that there can be any danger to us, Arlette, but I am here because it is part of my job. I may have to describe this visit and the house too. I do not mind going by myself, but we might walk into trouble, so unless you are quite happy about it you had better go with David."

"I must call you James now," she said as she put her hand on his arm, "and sometimes, per'aps I call you 'darling' which is what they say in England... Do not have the worry, James. I know what we 'ave to do. I am not so young as you think."

"No. I shouldn't think you are," David grinned. "Not as young as you look, either... Good luck, you two. If I'm not by the car when you come out you'd better come and look for me. If I'm in trouble I'll whistle an imitation of the peewit or you'll hear Mackie barking... He's very excited, by the way. He's shaking all over... Cheerio," and he faded away into the gloom.

"Now, Arlette. Remember that we've got to get in that house somehow. Ready? Good."

He felt her fingers on his arm and looked down and gave her a friendly smile. These children were certainly a grand crowd! Then he stepped into the porch and put his finger on the bell push. Faint and far away they could hear the bell ringing, but nobody answered, so he put his ear to the door and, thinking that he could hear voices, rang again. Next he knocked and stood back just as a porch light was switched on and the door opened suddenly by Valerie.

Wilson had not seen her before, and she was certainly very attractive. She was wearing a tweed suit and looked as if she was just going out. As usual she was smoking and she did not trouble to take the cigarette from her mouth as, after giving them a very keen glance, she said,

"I'm sorry. The business is closed for the day."

Wilson exerted all his charm.

"I know we're late but my car broke down and I had difficulty in finding Dore Street. I do hope that you will allow us to come in just for a few minutes to look round. We've come a very long way - from Worcester actually - and as we'd been most strongly recommended to you we wondered if-----"

"I'm sorry. We're closed. I told you once."

"Yes. I know. We're sorry, too. Perhaps you are Miss Saunders?"

"I am not. I'm her niece."

"Splendid! May I just explain why we're rather a special case? First we have a lot of money to spend and we want to spend it here. Secondly we are in a hurry. My fiancée here, Arlette Duchelle, is French, and is catching the night ferry to-night. We're to be married next month, and as we've been given a very handsome cheque we want to buy the best furniture we can find, and we know, from what others have told us, that we shall find it at the Grasshopper... If we could only look round for a very few minutes and take notes of anything we like, and the prices, then you can turn us out, and I'll come back to-morrow. But you will appreciate that with Mademoiselle it's now or never, won't you? Do please be a sport, and let us in?"

Arlette had not taken long to sum up Valerie - she remembered seeing her outside the Auction Rooms at Hastings - and knew quite well that only a man like Wilson could influence a woman like her. So all she did was to clasp Wilson's arm, look down shyly and murmur, "If you please, Mademoiselle. I shall be so thankful."

Valerie glanced at her, looked again more carefully, and then took her cigarette from her mouth, and said to Wilson,

"I doubt if my aunt could see you and she's just told me that we have to close because she's so busy, but if you're very quick and would like a quick look round I'll risk her wrath... If there's anything you like particularly I'll reserve it until you come back to-morrow, Mr...?"

"Wilson is my name... Thank you for letting us in. We're very grateful, aren't we, darling? If we could just look round for a few minutes we shall soon know what interests us... Please don't disturb yourself. We can manage quite well by ourselves, can't we, Arlette?"

Arlette gave him such a languishing look that Valerie turned away in distaste and led the way into the hall. Wilson was not an expert on furniture but he was quite sure that the pieces in the hall were genuine and extremely valuable. He looked round quickly and noticed the beautiful white staircase with its purple carpet, and the fact that lights were burning on the landing upstairs.

"Oh! Oh!" Arlette said rapturously. "Ze luffley table, darrling... I like that ver' much."

"That is not for sale," Valerie said coldly. "The furniture which we have to offer is in these galleries. If you will allow me I will switch on the lights. Unfortunately our men were moving a heavy cupboard this afternoon and smashed a pane of the window... This way, please... I shall be down in a few minutes so perhaps you would care to take a note of anything which pleases you," and she went out quickly and closed the door.

As soon as they were alone Wilson put his fingers to his lips, tiptoed to the door, and put his ear to the panels and his fingers on the handle. For a moment he wondered whether they had been locked in but the latter turned under his pressure and the door shifted slightly. He heard Valerie's footsteps in the hall and then quite distinctly a guttural voice coming apparently from the top landing.

"What's going on down there, Val? Who was that at the door? Come up at once and stop this foolery."

He was not sure but he thought he heard the girl's warning "Ssh!" and then the murmur of excited voices as she went upstairs. Then he whirled on Arlette.

"Talk naturally," he snapped. "Talk about the furniture and answer me as well as you can while you're doing it. She may come back and listen."

Arlette took her cue and did as well as she could under the circumstances. Wilson took her arm and led her towards the other end of the long room.

"Did you see two suitcases under that hall table, Arlette? I did... I can't think why she suddenly made up her mind to let us in. She's never seen me before and surely she hasn't seen you?..." He raised his voice. "That's a fine old grandfather clock against the wall. Do you think you'd like a clock like that? Or is it too big? What a pity! The glass of the face is broken..."

"It is too big for us, James. We could not have a clock so beeg... But I love it ver' much all the same... There is much glass on the floor here, James..."

And see this glass case in the corner. Zat is broken too... James. I notice somezing else. Zat girl..." her voice dropped to a dramatic whisper. "Zat girl I do not like at all but she is 'urt. She is 'urt on ze foot because she limp badly and she 'as the lump on her 'ead."

"Had she? I didn't notice that. She hadn't seen you before, had she?"



"THAT GIRL," WHISPERED GRANDON, POINTING A SHAKING FINGER
AT ARIETTE. "I KNOW HER. SHE'S FROM THE 'DOLPHIN'."

"Oh! James... Anuzzer luffley table. It is so small and ver', ver' chic. This I would like... Yes, James. I see her. I remember her. I see her at 'Astings where Madame Warrender go to buy ze furniture and then do not buy it. I was with Penny but per'aps she do not remember me. She come out and she see ze twins and then she go in 'er little car ver', ver' queek..."

"I wonder if she knew you. I thought perhaps she let us in after all because she may get a commission on all the sales she makes and she really thought we had some money... If only she knew how little I had got, Arlette!... Look out. Someone's coming."

They were both bending over a lovely Chinese cabinet with their heads very close together when the door opened suddenly.

"Good evening!" a harsh voice boomed at them. "My niece tells me that you, sir, can return to-morrow. I do not wish to appear discourteous but I must insist that this business is now closed for the day. Most of what you see here is sold in any case but my niece was not aware of that."

They turned to see a large, red-headed woman, smartly dressed in a tweed costume and wearing heavy spectacles, just inside the doorway. Arlette recognized her at once as the woman she had seen in the big car at Folkestone, and gave a little gasp as Wilson stepped forward with a pleasant smile.

"You must be the famous Miss Saunders. Do please forgive us for intruding, but as I explained to your niece-----"

"I am afraid my niece acted against the instructions I gave her that we could see no more customers to-night... To-morrow, perhaps. We had an accident in this gallery this afternoon and I must now ask you both to go."

Wilson stepped back to Arlette, who was at the far end of the room.

"I'm sorry, darling. It's too bad, but Miss Saunders cannot put up with customers to-night. We shall have to spend our money elsewhere."

Suddenly there came the sound of a car drawing up outside. The slam of a door and then a gust of wind swept into the room as the front door was pushed open.

Miss Ballinger for a moment seemed unable to move. Her mouth moved but no words came as Arlette and Wilson watched her. Then a little man in a close-tailored tweed coat and with a black soft hat still on his head came to the open doorway. His sallow face and narrow little black moustache seemed familiar to Arlette, who was no longer acting as she grabbed Wilson's hand.

The newcomer was speaking before he came into the gallery - just as soon as he saw Miss Ballinger in the open doorway.

"You should come at once," he said in a shaking voice. "*At once*. I have the car. It had better be the school."

Miss Ballinger turned and snarled at him, "Be quiet, you fool."

The man stepped further into the room until he could see Wilson and Arlette staring at him. Then he raised a shaking hand and pointed to the French girl.

"That girl," he whispered. "I know her. She was on the boat. *She was with the other children - the children from the Dolphin.*"

Wilson sprang forward but was not quick enough. Miss Ballinger with a great push sent Grandon staggering out into the hall and then, two steps behind him, slammed the door.

As Wilson tugged at the handle he heard the lock click home and the confused sound of shouting from outside.

11. The Twins Rescued

As soon as David left Wilson and Arlette in the drive of *The Grasshopper* and slipped away into the gloom he felt in his pocket for a piece of string and slipped it through Macbeth's collar. Then he put the little dog gently to the ground where he stood trembling on three legs.

"Now, Mackie. Keep close and keep quiet. We've got to find Dickie and Mary."

Macbeth knew well enough what was expected of him. If he could only get inside the house he would soon show David where the other two had been put, but now he was being taken away from the front door. He tried to show his disapproval by refusing to walk, but his master seemed more stupid than usual and merely scolded him for being stubborn, and then carried him under one arm in a most undignified position. But perhaps there would be a way in at the back of the house and perhaps he would be able to show David where the twins were from outside, so he struggled to be put down again.

He did hope that his master would understand that he was not shaking because he was afraid. He detested this house and the people in it, and there was nothing he would like better than to fight them again; but when he was really excited he found it impossible to control this trembling. He remembered that once Mr. Morton, for whom he had a very great respect, had explained to a friend that highly-bred, aristocratic dogs often trembled in moments of stress. He had not thought before that a human could show so much intelligence.

The rough string tickled his neck under his collar and the paw which he had cut on the jagged glass of the window was very sore when he put it to the ground, but if only David would not drag at him they would get on very well together. They usually did. He liked David until he bullied the twins and then, of course, there could be no doubt where his loyalties lay. Sometimes it was all very confusing. Then he felt David's hand on his head and moved quickly so that he could lick it.

Meanwhile, the boy was very glad of the dog's company, and was sure that if the twins had not been taken away from *The Grasshopper*, Mackie would lead him to them eventually.

He flattened himself against the wall of the house when he reached the corner and looked back, wondering how Wilson and Arlette were faring, and was just in time to see the porch light go up. He thought he heard voices, and after waiting a few interminable minutes realized that the others were now in the house and that he must hurry. It was nearly dark now and the wind was so noisy that he risked discovery by stepping off the flower beds, where he was getting scratched and wet, and walking on the wide path down the side of the house. On his right were some outbuildings, hidden from the front by a screen of trees - just the sort of place where the twins might hide or be hidden - so he urged Mackie over to them. They were old stables used now as the garages and seemed worth investigation.

The doors of the biggest were locked by a heavy padlock.

"Sniff underneath, Mackie. See if they're in there," David said, but the little dog moved away indifferently. Only a fool of a human would make such a stupid suggestion! Surely David's nose had already told him that Dickie and Mary were not there? He had always been puzzled by the fact that humans seemed unable to smell.

"All right, Mackie," David whispered. "Let's try the next one. These doors are open. This looks like Valerie's M.G. Perhaps we should have a look at it."

He opened the door of the car, slipped into the driving seat and felt for the ignition key without success. Then he decided to risk switching on the garage light. There was nothing in the car which he would not have expected to find - cigarette ends on the floor; cigarette packets in the dashboard pigeon-holes; a lipstick; the crumpled catalogues of two auction sales with some items carefully marked; and a mingled smell of petrol, perfume and tobacco.

"I suppose the Ballinger's big car which Jon and Penny saw is locked up next door," David murmured as he switched off the light again. "I wonder if

she has a chauffeur living in the house? That kid Judith said nothing about any other servants. Perhaps the villagers don't like working for the Ballinger, and I can hardly blame them, can you, Mackie?... Come on. Let's have a look at the kitchen quarters."

As soon as they turned the next corner they saw a blaze of light from one of the ground floor windows. David dropped to his knees and dragging Mackie behind him crawled along until the sill was above him and then raised himself cautiously. He saw a large and untidy kitchen with food scattered over the table and most of the cupboards open. The door was open too, but although there was nobody there he wondered whether he should wait to see who did come in eventually. Then he remembered that he now had allies inside the house and that his job was to see if there was any trace of the twins outside.

Macbeth was now showing signs of considerable agitation and struggling and straining so hard against his temporary lead that he began to choke. David ducked down again and, whispering encouragement to the dog, crawled forward until his outstretched hand touched the brick coping of a grating a few inches above ground level. Mackie was now whining and scratching at some iron bars inside the brickwork, and David, with a sudden thrill of triumph, realized that these bars might well cover the well of a window to a cellar.

"Are they there, Mackie? In a cellar?"

Macbeth said "Yes" as positively as he could, but when David tried to shake the bars they were immovable and it was too dark to see a window below, and there was no glimmer of light showing. He pressed his face to the cold iron and called as loudly as he dared. Then he whistled the Peewit's call, which was the sign by which the Lone Piners called each other, but no answer came, and the wind seemed to blow more fiercely than before, while Mackie whined and tore his claws on the unyielding brickwork.

"Never mind, old chap," David whispered as he picked him up. "We'll come back. The only way in from here would be to smash the bricks or file through the bars... Let's see if the others have come out yet, and then we'll

all come back together or force our way in through a door and demand the twins."

They went round the house, noticing lights in some of the upstairs windows, and were nearly at the front again when the bushes were suddenly lit up as a car roared into the drive and swung round to the front door. David ran forward and flung himself under a dripping holly tree and then crawled forward on hands and knees again until he could see what was happening.

The car was an ordinary black saloon, and he was just wondering whether he ought to take some such drastic action as letting the air out of the tyres when a man, shouting and waving his arms, came out into the porch. As he turned, gesticulating, David recognized their old enemy, "Slinky" Grandon. "I bet he's running away as usual," he thought. "And now here are the others."

Miss Ballinger, staggering under the weight of two heavy suit-cases, appeared next and screamed something at Grandon, who opened the door of the car with one hand while waving the other to someone still in the hall. Then came Valerie with two more cases. She was not nearly so agitated, and because she did not seem to be hurrying Grandon sprang at her and grabbed her arm, and David could see his mouth forming the words, "Quick! Be quick!"

She shook herself free indignantly and stepped off the porch in the direction of the garages at the side of the house, and just at that moment the wind dropped and David, in his hiding-place, heard their voices quite clearly.

"Always the first to run, you little rat!" Valerie was saying to Grandon. "Get out of my way if you won't carry my luggage for me. I'm going in my own car."

Then Ballinger stepped forward, grabbed the girl's two cases and flung them into the car behind her.

"Don't be a fool," her voice boomed. "Get in here and don't argue... Don't you stand there gibbering, man... Help me push her in."

And Valerie, kicking and struggling in a very undignified way, was thrust into the back of the car and followed quickly by her aunt, who slammed the door. Thirty seconds later the car was out on the road again, and David, scrambling to his feet, saw it turn south towards the Marsh.

Mackie was now barking excitedly round his feet, and as he automatically stooped to pet him he became aware of another noise - a booming and crashing, which was louder than the noise of the storm. He ran forward along the drive and realized that someone inside the front room with the broken window was trying to smash the wooden shutters with something very strong and heavy. Four more panes of glass tinkled to the ground, and then David heard his name.

"Are you there, David? They've locked us in."

"Yes, I'm here," he yelled in return. "Half a sec and I'll try the front door."

He was back in five seconds.

"No good. That's locked, and it will take me longer to get that down than it will take you to bash those shutters... I'll stand back now and give you plenty of room."

There was another splintering crash as the heavy stool which Rattray had thrown at Macbeth broke through the wooden shutters and sent more glass tinkling to the ground. Two minutes later Wilson had smashed a hole large enough to put his head through.

"Did you see what happened, David? Has that nasty crowd escaped? Have you found the twins?"

David answered the last question first.

"No, but I believe they're in the house. I found the window to a cellar, but it's guarded with iron bars. Mackie was very excited, and I think they may be there... Yes, Ballinger and Co. went in Slinky's car - they drove off towards the Marsh. What shall we do? I don't think I can break down the front door from this side."

"We must telephone Rawlings and then search the house for the twins," Wilson snapped. "I thought it would be better to get out by the window, but these shutters were locked with an iron bar... I'll try the door now and let you in, David... Yes, Arlette's all right."

So David ran into the porch for shelter while Mackie stood with one paw raised and his head on one side close against the front door listening to Wilson's assault on the door of the furniture gallery. It took him nearly ten minutes to smash it, for this was a well-built house; but at last the three of them met in the hall.

Wilson was almost too breathless to speak. His face was streaked with dirt and perspiration, his collar and tie awry and a cut on his hand was bleeding profusely. Arlette, on the other hand, was looking as fresh and charming as usual, but her colour was high and her eyes bright with excitement.

"Ullo, Daveed! They make the fools of us and lock us in, but ze brave Monsieur Wilson - my fiance - 'e *smash* a way out..."

"Behave yourself, Arlette," Wilson said. "First job is a telephone. Search the place, David, and let's hurry."

It did not take long to find Miss Ballinger's office leading out of another smaller furniture gallery. This little room looked as if a cyclone had passed through it - it was in an appalling muddle, with papers on the floor, ashes of paper in the hearth and a safe, with nothing in it, open in a corner.

Wilson rushed to the telephone and demanded the Romney police station without looking up a number.

He was put through to Rawlings at once, told him where they were and what had happened.

"... And the little foreign-looking chap - David here says he's known as Grandon - said something about the school... What's that?... Pardon?... Hi! Rawlings. Are you there?"

Then he turned to the others.

"He's rung off. He seems in a hurry... What's that din outside there?"

"It's Mackie," David explained. "I think he's found something. Let's hope it's the twins."

And so Macbeth led them down a flight of brick steps outside the kitchen to a cellar door which was locked on the outside with the key still in the lock.

Inside they found the twins on the floor with their wrists and ankles tied with cord and gagged with their own handkerchiefs. The cellar was dry and even contained a few odd pieces of furniture as the rescuers could see by the dim light of a low-powered bulb hanging from the ceiling. Over the window which David had seen from outside was nailed several thicknesses of sacking.

Mackie rushed joyfully to his beloved master and mistress as Arlette cried out with fear and anger. David bent first over his sister, cut the rope round her wrists and feet and ripped away the dirty handkerchief in her mouth.

"I knew you'd come, David," were the first words she said; then, as he lifted her up and gave her a clumsy hug, she turned and, hiding her face against his coat, sobbed so that her little body shook. "I didn't cry until you came," she gulped. "Honestly I didn't. Not even when we heard you whistle the peewit and we couldn't answer... We did try to fight them, David, but there were too many... David! let me stay like this for just a little minute, then I'll be all right... Is it Arlette with you? And Mr. Wilson... I'll tell you in a minute, but we've found out something..."



"I DIDN'T CRY UNTIL YOU CAME, DAVID, HONESTLY I DIDN'T,"
GULPED MARY, WHILE WILSON RELEASED DICKIE.

Meanwhile, Wilson had released Dickie, who was prancing round the cellar in a fury and rubbing his wrists where the cord had cut into them as he had struggled. His lip was bleeding, too, and when Mackie jumped up at him he grabbed the little dog in his arms and let him lick his face all over. Then he ran over to Mary, and just for a second, with an odd and unexpected gesture, put his filthy hand on her curls in a caress.

"It's all right, twin. We're both all right. We never gave in, twin, did we...?"

"What did they do to you, Richard?" Wilson said with a hard note in his voice. "Don't worry. We'll get them, but what did they do?"

"They tied us up. There were three of them, you see, and Ballinger is big and heavy, and there was a man in a grey suit. I kicked Valerie so hard that she screamed and slapped me in the face... We couldn't help it, really. We did fight hard-----"

"That's all right, boy," Wilson said gruffly. "We know you fought them. Did they do anything to you besides tying you up?"

Mary removed her face from David's coat and smiled at them shakily.

"I feel much better now. Sorry if I was a baby. They didn't do anything much, except *threaten* us... They said that if we didn't tell them all about us they'd turn the light out and not give us anything to eat or drink... They didn't acksherly hit us or anything, though Ballinger wanted to very badly."

"How did they catch you?"

"We just came in and looked round and said we wanted to buy something cheap for our Mum, and then Mackie chased a stupid cat and a grandfather clock fell over and about a million gold watches fell out, and it was just about then that we thought we'd like to be going-----"

"And it was just then that they thought not," Dickie broke in. "It was an awful fight while it lasted. The two women held the one of us who wasn't being tied, while the man tied up the other... I bet he's not feeling too good either... It was when the watches fell out of the clock that they got so excited... I think those gold watches are important, don't you, David?... I wish somebody would get me something to eat. We've been starved in this ghastly dungeon. Could we go upstairs now - and p'raps you'd tell us what's happened to Ballinger and the others?"

They all went up to the kitchen and while Arlette was making tea and Dickie had grabbed a hunk of bread from the table, David went back to the office to telephone the *Dolphin* and Mrs. Warrender.

"I thought you'd like to know the twins are all right, Mrs. Warrender. Mr. Wilson is bringing us back in a few minutes. Nothing to worry about, I promise. May I speak to Jon or Penny, please?"

Faintly, Mrs. Warrender's voice came to him across the wire while the wind howled outside and the rain lashed the windows.

"Thank you for ringing, David. I'm glad to know that your two are all right. Come back as soon as you can because I'm not sure whether I'm on my head or my heels."

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Warrender. We're coming back almost right away," and then, thinking that she had not heard him before, he repeated, "May I speak to Jon or Penny, please?"

"I heard you the first time, David. I'm sorry that the only thing I can tell you about my two is that they're at the police station... Yes, David. That's what I said... The police station. They had a telephone message and said they were going to the police station, and taking everything into consideration, I thought that was as safe a place as any for them... When you say that you're all coming back I presume you're coming here and not going to spend the rest of the holidays with the police? I'd like to know whether any of you are ever coming back to the *Dolphin* again?"

David realized that Wilson was now just behind him, so he said, "Hold on a sec, Mrs. Warrender, please," and then repeated her last question to Wilson, who then took the telephone from him.

"This is James Wilson, Mrs. Warrender. Arlette, the twins and David are safe and sound, I promise you. I'll look after them. They've helped me to the biggest story of my life, and I'm just going after it."

12. The Ghost Train

The telephone message for the Warrenders from the police station in Rye came just in time to stop Penny from quarrelling with everybody in the *Dolphin*, and with Jon in particular. Her cousin was used to her tantrums, but on this occasion he was almost as touchy as she was, as they fidgeted from one room to another waiting for news.

"The trouble with you, Jon," Penny stormed as she walked restlessly up and down her aunt's sitting-room, "is that you're getting feeble as you get older. I don't know why it is, but you're just *feeble*. Fancy taking orders from that conceited man Wilson! Fancy allowing David and Arlette to go off like that to find the twins! I can't understand you, Jon. Honestly I can't. Once - and not so long ago - you wouldn't have been bossed about by grown-ups... Just think for a moment of what's happened. We started this adventure in Paris. You saw Slinky at the cafe and I saw Ballinger at Folkestone. Everything that's happened has been because of us two and now here we are sitting like good children at home twiddling our thumbs, just because you're too feeble to *exert* yourself..."

"I expect you mean *assert* myself, you little idiot," Jon snapped. "Do stop talking so much, Penny, there's a good little girl..."

"*What* did you dare to call me-----" she began, and then the telephone rang and Jon grabbed it first.

"I'm to speak to Mr. Jonathan Warrender, if you please," came the slow Sussex drawl. "This is the police... I be speakin' to Mr. Warrender?... Ah! Message from Mr. Rawlings, if you please... Mr. Rawlings says as how he'd be glad if you and your cousin and the other lad, David, would kindly step down to the police station as soon as convenient, as he may want you to identify someone here pretty soon... And if Mr. Wilson is there he can come, too... What's that, sir? Mr. Wilson is not with you? No matter, then. We'll be getting into touch with him, no doubt... And now I'm to speak to Mrs. Warrender if you please, sir. I'll be holding on."

Jonathan turned with his eyes blazing with excitement.

"It's the police, Penny. We're to go down to the station. Message from Rawlings. Fetch Mother at once, please. They want to speak to her."

"Can't we keep the grown-ups out of it even now?" Penny began, and then, when Jon put down the telephone and pushed her aside, she flung back the door and raced down the stairs.

Mrs. Warrender was with them in a few moments, and when Jon said, "It's the police, Mother," she lifted the receiver as if it was red hot.

Jon and Penny - the latter too breathless to speak - stood by and watched her as she nodded and said, "Yes. I see... Very well... It sounds most ridiculous to me, and I have no idea what they've been up to... Very well. I'll tell them and thank you very much for ringing... Good-bye."

"I'm sorry we haven't been able to tell you everything that's been happening, Mother," Jon began as soon as she turned round, "but you do know that sometimes it's impossible. We've run up against the Ballinger and Slinky again - but we did tell you that - and it's something to do with smuggling, and we've been able to help a bit. What did the police say to you? They want us to go down to the police station right away."

Mrs. Warrender sat down and nodded feebly.

"Who's Mr. Rawlings?"

"A detective. A real one," Jon said. "He's a grand chap. He's in charge of all this... We'd better go now, hadn't we? Don't worry about the twins because Mr. Wilson has gone to find them, but if they're not back in an hour will you telephone the police? I'll tell them what's happened in the meantime... Come on, Penny, although you don't deserve to be taken."

"What did they say you were to tell us, darling?" Penny said as she hopped from one foot to the other in excitement. "Wasn't there another message for us?"

"Yes, there was. And I give up, for I've no doubt you'll be as safe and well looked after in a police station as anywhere else... But it didn't sound as if you'd be there long because he said that you were both to bring old, warm clothes and waterproofs as there's to be some bird-watching to-night."

"He really said that?" Penny demanded as she flung her arms round her aunt and hugged her. "He really did? What a grand policeman! I'm so *thankful* we're able to tell you everything now, Auntie, and thank you for being so wonderful about it... Don't keep me waiting, Jonathan," and she danced out of the room.

When she came down her cousin was waiting for her in the yard talking to Fred.

"You look as if you'd put on some weight," he grinned. "How many sweaters have you got on under that disgusting mackintosh?"

"Mind your own business and help me on with these rubber boots. I can never really manage them properly unless I'm lying down."

She stood on one leg and leaned on his shoulder while he pulled on the first boot.

"I hate saying I'm sorry to you, Jon, particularly because I seem to say it so often, but I'm sorry I said you were feeble... I think you're wonderful at boots... Thanks! Now let's hurry... 'Bye, Fred."

As they ran out under the light in the archway into Trader's Street she grabbed his sleeve, and when he smiled down at her he noticed that she was wearing the green beads he had bought for her in Paris.

The weather was so bad now that very few people were about. The wind tore through Rye's narrow streets, sang among the chimney pots and brought with it heavy gusts of rain from the south-west as they struggled, with flapping waterproofs and heavy boots, down to the police station, where they were welcomed by a ruddy-faced young man in plain clothes, who announced himself as Sergeant Robins.

"Well, well!" he said with an approving glance at Penny as he hauled himself into his oilskin. "So you're the two from the *Dolphin*, are you? I don't know what the Force is coming to now we have to call in the likes of you; but orders is orders, so come along."

"That's all very well," Penny said as she took off her sou'-wester and shook the rain from her curls, "but you don't have to patronize us, Sergeant, and we'll get on much better if you remember that... Where are we going? Where's Mr. Rawlings?"

Two constables sitting at a table roared with laughter at this outburst, but Sergeant Robins went on smiling until Penny smiled back .

"We're going after some rare sea-birds," he said, "and I hope you're a good sailor, Redhead... Come on. Cheerio, all... Who'd be a policeman on a night like this?"

A big car with another policeman in a peaked cap at the wheel was waiting for them outside, and within a few minutes they had left the town behind them.

"Rye Harbour?" Jon asked, and when Robins nodded he went on, "You might just as well tell us where we're going because we know this district, and I dare say we know far more about this smuggling business than you do."

Robins chuckled at this and agreed that the latter was probably true.

"You'll see soon enough," he said. "My job is to take you safe and sound over to Dungeness. We're going by sea, and I don't mind telling you both that I wish we weren't. I'm not much of a sailor."

Rye Harbour is not very much more than a few fishermen's houses, some sheds and wharves on the western bank of the river Rother opposite Camber Sands. The car stopped on a muddy quay and almost before she realized what was happening Penny found herself being helped down a slippery ladder into a powerful motor-boat which was swaying against the side of the dock as the tide swirled down the estuary. Jon came next and was

quickly followed by Robins, and then the three of them were urged by friendly voices down a few steps into a tiny cabin.

"Is this a police boat?" Jon said peevishly as the boat moved off. "I do wish somebody would tell us something."

"No, son," Robins explained. "Belongs to the Revenue people... Customs - the chaps whose job it is to stop this smuggling and who have to call in the police... Now hold tight, because I feel we're near the sea."

Penny glanced at Jon, who nodded, and they both slipped out into the little well of the boat. There were four men aboard, who were friendly without being talkative, and as none of them interfered they stood there together as the boat cut through the tumult of tossing seas with the Dungeness light on their port side.

Penny pulled Jon's head down to her level and shouted into his ear:

"Isn't this wonderful? Don't you wish it could go on for ever?... Jon! you are beastly. Why don't you answer me when I say something nice?"

"No need to deafen me... Yes, this is all right. I wish we knew about David and the twins, though. I must tell Mr. Rawlings about them as soon as we meet him, and I wish I knew what was going to happen."

"It's not knowing that's so wonderful. I hate things planned in advance. If only you were a bit more human I think this would be the most thrilling evening in my life..." and she turned her back to him and gazed fixedly at the shore just in time to see three red flashes. The man at the wheel saw them, too, for he shouted an order and the boat swung round while one of the crew flashed an answering signal.

Jon polished his glasses and continued the conversation just as if Penny had not said anything personal.

"Looks as if we're going ashore on this side of the Ness," he remarked.
"Must be somewhere near the bird sanctuary. I wonder how they're going to land us? It looks jolly rough."

Before she could answer Robins emerged from the cabin and looked at the line of white foam along the beach with distaste.

"The sooner I be on land again the better I'll like it," he said. "Reckon I'd rather be a policeman than a sailor... There should be another boat coming out to take us in, and I'm not going to enjoy that much either... Here she is, coming up now."

Their boat, with her engines in reverse, was now as close to the shore as she could get, and suddenly a dinghy with two men in it loomed up out of the gloom.

"The girl first," a slow voice drawled, and almost before she knew what had happened she had landed in an undignified sprawl in the bottom of the dinghy. The motor-boat manoeuvred again and then Jon jumped with Robins just behind him.

"Good-bye, and thank you," Penny waved to the Revenue men as their boat put about and disappeared in the darkness. "Thank you for a wonderful trip," and then she turned and smiled at their two new friends, who looked like fishermen, but who did not seem much inclined for conversation. One stood in the bows while the other rowed through the breaking waves until suddenly there was a grinding noise and Penny was flung forward as the boat's speed was checked. In a flash the first man jumped ashore and yelled for Robins.

"You next. Quick! Get her up the beach."

Jon, thinking that he could help with the boat, then jumped before he was ordered, and found himself up to the waist in the breaking waves. The undertow was horribly strong and he felt himself slipping backwards as Penny screamed - something he had never heard her do before. The man left in the boat shouted something which he could not hear, and then Robins was beside him with a helping hand which dragged him back to safety.

"Thanks!" Jon gasped, but the only answer he got was a curt, "Do as you're told next time."

It looked as if Penny was ready to jump, too, but Jon, as he heaved on the gunwale of the boat, shouted, "Stay there, Penny. We'll soon have you in."

A huge wave broke over the stern and half filled the boat with water, but with another great heave they beached her and Penny, half laughing and not so far from tears, found herself clinging to Jon and then trying to shake him.

"Idiot!" she gasped. "Idiot! Why did you jump like that?... You might have upset the boat."

"Sorry," Jon said with an odd catch in his voice. "You all right, Newpenny? That last wave was a beauty, wasn't it?" and then he felt for a handkerchief to wipe the spray from his spectacles.

"If you two are ready we'll be getting along now," Robins said, and when Penny, whose cheeks were flaming in the darkness, said coldly, "We're quite ready, thank you," he just chuckled and went on, "Follow as close as you can and don't talk, and if you fall down don't grumble. We've got to get past the lighthouse without being seen, and these chaps say that it's rough going."

The warning was justified, for, so far as they could tell, there was no track and they kept stumbling into little hollows and over shingly hillocks. Far away to their left they could see the lights of the houses on the sea front at Greatstone, while in front of them the great beam from the lighthouse lit up the roofs of the station and restaurant every few seconds.

Their guides kept them well away from the road and soon they were on loose shingle again and could hear the roar of the waves below them. Soon after they had passed the lighthouse well away on their left the two fishermen melted away into the darkness and Robins whispered, "I know where we are. Keep close, and whatever you may see keep quiet."

They scrambled on over the shingle and at last stopped behind a wooden hut, which, the lighthouse beam showed them, was very near to the spot where Wilson had left the green bicycle. The station buildings were in front of them now across the road and the sea at their backs. They had, indeed,

walked right round the point of the Ness itself, hugging the shore and avoiding the road, the old railway line and the cottages by the lighthouse.

"I must ask you both to promise not to move from here until you're given permission," Robins whispered. "Those are my orders. There's to be some fun soon, and you'll see it from here, I reckon, but now I've to report for another job."

"I shouldn't dream of giving a promise I might have to break," Penny said. "It's a silly thing to ask and only a man would think of it."

The sergeant seemed very taken aback by this outburst, particularly as when the beam from the lighthouse swung round he saw how very determined Penny was looking. He turned for help to Jon, but before he could speak the boy whispered, "Just a sec, Sergeant. There's something coming along the road."

They shrank back into the shadow at the side of the hut, waiting for the beam, but just before it reached them a car, without headlights, passed very quietly along the road towards the station. When the light came again they saw it clearly; the next time they saw the car parked by the restaurant and a human figure carrying something heavy disappearing into the shadows in the direction of the old railway line and the ruined school.

Then all was quiet but for the wind, the sound of the distant sea and, to Penny, the thudding of her own heart which she thought must be shaking Jon, too, as she stood close against him.

"Was that a police car?" he whispered, and Robins shook his head.

"You'll have to give me your word now. I must go. Someone will come here for you, but you're not to move."

Jon nodded.

"All right, Sergeant. We'll stay... Don't move for a minute, though. There's a bike coming along the road now... Wait for the light, Penny, but I swear it

looked like Rattray... Yes, it is... He looks as if he'd had enough cycling for a long time..."

"He won't get much more," a strange voice remarked. "He's going to have a long rest from cycling, I think," and when they turned and the flash came they saw Rawlings in a raincoat and a check cap standing just behind them. "Very well, Robins," he went on, "you may go. I'll look after these two..."

"Good-bye, Sergeant," Penny whispered wickedly. "Thank you for looking after us so nicely... Who's this man, Jon! Is it your detective?"

"Yes, it is, miss, and you'll kindly do as you're told," Rawlings replied. "No doubt I'm very wrong in allowing you to be here at all, but I think we owe you something. Wilson phoned me from that place in Dore Street. Your friend is with him and they've found the twins they lost!... Now it's time to go... Come over and see the fun on the beach. I reckon we've got a few in the trap and the ghost train is due at any moment now."

He led them across the shingle to the high bank, where Wilson had watched the swimmer come ashore.

"Keep your heads down and watch," Rawlings whispered. "There she is now. Just coming in..."

But before he had finished speaking they heard the sound of a car, coming very fast, along the road from Greatstone. Rawlings muttered something under his breath, jumped to his feet and began to run back to the road when he saw that the car's headlights were full on. Then, with the screech of brakes which they could hear quite easily, the car pulled up suddenly near the hut behind which they had been hiding, and the lights were switched off. Rawlings was stumbling over the shingle thirty yards away when, in a lull in the wind, Jon and Penny, not knowing which way to turn, heard a plaintive but familiar voice from the road.

"Don't be so ridiculous. If you really *are* a policeman we're all on the same side... Be quiet, Mackie darling... He doesn't seem to know it, but he's a friend..."

Penny began to giggle.

"How marvellous, Jon! It's the twins. Don't, Jon! You're hurting my arm..."

He swung her round to face the beach.

"Look! That's the motor-boat which brought us over. The Revenue men."

The sea on this side was almost calm and the first thing they saw was an ordinary fishing-boat without sails silhouetted clearly in the beam of a searchlight coming from their motor-boat, which had just swept round the point and cut off the other's retreat. Then they heard a shouted order from across the water and the Revenue boat closed in, and after some more confused shouting the smugglers' boat stopped as the other came alongside.

When Rawlings came back he was out of breath and in a very bad temper. He glanced approvingly out to sea and then snapped:

"Your lot are all right, anyway, but they nearly spoiled everything by that display. Wilson should have known better. They must have thought we wanted France to know what we were doing... You can all go to the railway station now and no further. Obey orders, please."

Feeling rather like two small children who had been ordered to bed, Jon and Penny turned and trudged across the shingle towards the road. Jon whistled the peewit's call and Dickie, Mary and Macbeth rushed to meet them.

"We've been imprisoned again," Dickie panted. "Honestly, we have... Locked up in a cellar by the Ballinger and *gagged*..."

"David found us - and Mackie," Mary added. "We're all right, Jon and Penny. Are you? You're both looking a bit miserable. What's going to happen now?"

Penny gave the little girl a hug and then David and Arlette came forward to greet them, but before they could say much Wilson broke into the excited group and said firmly:

"This isn't a school excursion. Stop chattering. The police have got a job to do, and we've got to help them by obeying orders. Jon, you know the way. Lead us straight to the station, where I'm told we can stay if we keep quiet. No fuss and no talking."

But on the deserted platform they had another surprise, for just as Jon was explaining how the narrow gauge line ran round in a circle to avoid a turntable for the engines at the terminus, David nudged him and said, "I suppose I'm crazy, but I thought I heard a train... Listen!"

In the pause that followed, Arlette, who had not been listening either to Jon or to David, continued the story of her adventure at the *Grasshopper* to Penny.

"Never! Never have I so much excitement enjoyed, Pennee. The beeg fat woman when she 'eard the man you call ze Slinkee say he know me she slam and lock ze great door and zare we are, my wonderful James and me, alone in ze prison... *Pardon*, Daveed? You wish to 'ear somesing!... Oh! I just speak to Pennee..."

"It *is* a train. It's coming now," Dickie whispered. "It's got no lights, but it's puffing, and I can see the smoke..."

"All of you get back in the waiting-room place," Wilson snapped, while Penny whispered, "Rawlings said something about a ghost train. I don't think I like it."

As they ran down the platform they could all see the engine - not as tall as Dickie - and four miniature, unlighted coaches gliding towards them. Macbeth barked and then, from the shadows by the restaurant, Sergeant Robins stepped and said:

"Keep out of the way, *if* you please. This is a train for poor tired policemen."

With a quiet hissing the little locomotive pulled up gently. The driver got out and, towering above his engine, wiped his hands on an oily rag while, from the unlighted coaches behind him, came about twenty large uniformed

men. The effect was so ludicrous that Penny was reminded of Gulliver in Lilliput. Arlette began to giggle, while Dickie whistled in delighted amazement.

"Some day I've got to drive that," he whispered. "I've *got* to do it before we go back."

Then Robins stepped forward, spoke to one of the men and led the way off the platform into the darkness. The sound of their footsteps on the road and on the shingle died away before David said:

"Where do you think they're going?"

"Wait here and see," Wilson said. "I'm going to have a word with the driver of the ghost train."

He was soon back.

"Says he's to wait and asked if this was a new idea for a Sunday school treat... Will you stop here until I find out what's happening? Rawlings said you were not to go farther, didn't he?"

"He may have done," Penny said decisively, "but we're not going to stop here, and you can do as you like, James dear. You know and we know that those policemen have gone to surround the ruined school because Ballinger and Co. are probably in there... Come to think of it, Jon and I must have seen them arrive... Don't be silly, James! You can come with us if you like, but we're going... I must do something violent soon because my teeth are chattering with excitement."

Wilson laughed.

"All right. But do be sensible if there's trouble and take care of those twins, David. I'm going ahead. I want my story," and he dashed off into the shadows.

"Selfish pig," Penny said. "Wants all the fun for himself. Just like a man, isn't it, Arlette?"

"I do not theenk he is a peeg. He look after me in ze beeg house and I think he-----"

"You think he's ver', ver' nice," Dickie interrupted. "We know you do, Arlette, but do let's go if we're going. I want to see Ballinger utterly surrounded by those policemen."

He had his wish, but it was not a very exciting spectacle. Jon led the way up the old railway line, but before they reached the school they saw moving lights close in round the ruined building, heard the warning blasts of a police whistle and then some shouts and a scream. They tried to run on the sleepers, but Mary fell down twice and Arlette twisted her ankle so that by the time they reached the scene of action the excitement was nearly over.

A man in a cap flashed a torch in their faces as they came up panting, and Rawlings said:

"I expected you'd be along whatever I said. Come and have a look at these beauties and tell me if you've seen them before."

They followed him quietly over to a group in the porch. Some policemen moved aside and the light of their torches shone on the faces of Miss Ballinger, Valerie, Grandon and Rattray. Only the girl showed courage - or was it just defiance? She stood disdainfully with her head high and the inevitable cigarette between her lips, and when she recognized Jon and David they thought that she gave them the flicker of a smile. Rattray looked a poor specimen. His tweed hat had gone and so had whatever dignity he may have once possessed. He did not even look up when, in the curious silence which fell upon them all, Mackie barked sharply.

Grandon spoke then - a whining curse about dogs and children - and the policeman next to him said, "Quiet, you!" There was nothing smart about Grandon now, and he looked the coward he had always been. His pale face was streaked with dirt and a lock of dank, black hair fell across his forehead. One hand was in the pocket of his waisted overcoat, and the other plucked nervously at his mouth.

But Ballinger! Penny felt sick as she looked at her. There was no fun left in this adventure now. Perhaps it had all been over when she had stood with Jon and Robins in the shadow of the fishermen's hut and seen the criminals walk into the trap! She knew, of course, that the woman before her was not only cruel, but a clever criminal, but the sight of defeat is never pleasant, and suddenly Penny wished she was back home at the *Dolphin*. She turned away.

Ballinger had gone to pieces. Her dyed hair was awry and her clothes that once had been so smart now looked almost shapeless as she slumped forward with one hand on her niece's shoulder. Her eyes, behind her heavy spectacles, flicked from one to the other almost without recognition. Her mouth looked different too, and she was mumbling something which sounded like, "All a ridiculous mistake. Nobody will listen now but it's a mistake... Nothing to do with watches and never have done... A wicked, careless mistake..."

Penny heard Jon say to Rawlings, "Yes, that's Miss Ballinger. They're all the same including Grandon, but until this week I've never seen Rattray before... Can we go now? I think we've all had enough." Then, most unexpectedly, he put an arm round her shoulder. "I know how you're feeling. I hate it too. Let's go."

Rawlings gave a quiet order and then turned away with them.

"Thanks," he said. "That's a good job well done. We'll take you back to Rye, by road this time. Hope you didn't mind the motor-boat but we didn't want any more cars along the coast road than could be helped... Did anybody tell you that Grandon showed us the way into an underground Air-Raid Shelter underneath the kitchen in that place, where there are thousands of pounds' worth of smuggled watches?"

And so they came back to the station where the little train, with steam hissing from the engine, was waiting for the policemen and the prisoners, though the weary Lone Piners and Arlette went back to Rye in luxury in two big, black cars.

"Yes. I'm coming too," Rawlings said. "I must see Mrs. Warrender and apologize for our high-handed abduction of you - and here's Wilson, looking very pleased with himself."

Wilson was.

"Going to Rye?" he grinned. "Good! If you don't mind I'll try to beat you to it in my own car and ask Mrs. Warrender if I can telephone from the *Dolphin*? This is the story my paper has been waiting for - thanks for your help, Rawlings."

As they roared back along the rough road to Lydd, David turned round and watched the Dungeness light swing round.

"I shall never forget that place," he said. "I wish Peter had been here... When are we going to hear the rest of the story, Mr. Rawlings?"

Before he could answer Penny said,

"You come and have supper with us, Mr. Rawlings. I'm going to enjoy having a meal with a detective, and I know my aunt will too, and then we can all ask *you* questions which I expect will be a change for you... Dickie and Mary will be awake again then."

And this was what they did. After the reunion with Mrs. Warrender the children went to wallow in hot baths and changed into clean clothes, while Wilson was still using the private telephone for his long call to London.

It was too late now for any hotel guests to be using the dining-room so a table was set there for them all. Rawlings came back from the Police Station as he had promised, and while they drank hot soup and munched sandwiches, Mrs. Warrender sat at the top of the table with her chin on her folded hands and watched them all rather wistfully. It would be nice to be as young again as these vital girls and boys - all so different and yet such good friends. She listened to the nice detective's slow, quiet voice and the handsome Wilson's quick questions and quicker laugh. She saw David nudge his brother violently as the latter nodded over his plate, and then her

eyes went to her own solemn Jonathan and the girl she loved as if she was her own daughter. How good these two were for each other!

Rawlings told his story well in spite of interruptions, and although many of his suspicions had yet to be proved, his listeners had very few doubts that they were correct.

The idea behind the smuggling of watches was the avoidance of Purchase Tax. They were not certain for how long Grandon and Ballinger had been working together again - the former from France and Belgium and the latter as receiving and selling agent in England. There was no doubt that *The Grasshopper* was a genuine business and that Ballinger really had a very good knowledge of antiques, but there was also no doubt that it had made a convenient shield for their smuggling activities, to which Valerie was a willing partner. It was possible that contacts in the antique furniture business were useful for the disposal of the watches for re-sale to the public.

Rattray was not of much importance, it seemed, and merely acted as a runner to take the watches to *The Grasshopper* from various places, such as churches, where they were hidden for collection.

"We don't know for sure," Rawlings went on as he brushed his magnificent moustache out of the way of his soup cup, "but we doubt if he ever received goods direct from the beaches of Dungeness or Dymchurch. Ballinger seems to have employed rather more ignorant go-betweens, such as the couple at Channel View, for this job. There is also another respectable gentleman who lives in a bungalow behind Dymchurch Wall who is under suspicion."

"How long has this been going on?" David asked. "It all seems very risky."

"Not very long here, although the Grasshopper business has probably been disposing of smuggled goods brought into the country by other means and in other places for some time. I think they tried Dungeness because it was near to Dore Street and seemed simple. Watches are small and light and pack easily, so the swimming ashore scheme from fishing boats or private yachts succeeded for a time. I think we shall find that smuggled watches are

not the worst of their crimes. They've been just a trifle too clever, and we've been helped because you youngsters saw Grandon in Paris and had the sense to be suspicious. We're obliged to you all... Now I must go, and thank you kindly, Mrs. Warrender, for your hospitality."

"Just a minute, *please*," Penny begged. "I'm still puzzled about Rattray. How did he *know* where to look in church hassocks and places like that, and why was he used at all if other people got the goods ashore and did the hiding?"

"I guess that the go-betweens never knew Ballinger, Grandon, or the girl Valerie, and that it was never intended that they should. Ballinger may have some hold over Rattray who was employed solely as a collector, which he managed very well in his guise as a naturalist. I should think he would receive instructions by telephone or letter simply saying 'School' or 'Dymchurch Church' Sometimes, as we know, the chalked grasshopper would give him the clue he needed. He's made a statement and admitted that he ran the same business for a time on the Essex marshes and that Valerie used to meet him at odd places in her car and pick up the parcels. He also admits that he panicked and hit Wilson on the head with his binoculars in the school. He's not a very brave little man and seems upset about that... Now I should think Mrs. Warrender would say you all ought to be in bed. I wish I was... Good night, all. You'll be hearing from us if we want you later."

"He's right," Mrs. Warrender said when he had gone. "Bed for you all. It's too late now for me to say what I think of you, but I've got you safe home again and that's the most important thing."

"Please don't be too hard on them," James Wilson smiled as he held out his hand, "and thank you for all you've done to help me. I'll hope to come and stay at the *Dolphin* again - when I want a real holiday, of course!"

"Come, Arlette," Penny said. "Let's see him off the premises."

David, Jon and the twins followed, and when Wilson had shaken hands all round - and kissed Arlette's hand as an extra - and made them promise to

read his paper in the morning, he got into his car and drove off down Trader's Street.

They stood for a long minute watching the red rear light get smaller and smaller and then Penny shivered, and putting her arm through Arlette's said, "I hate saying good-bye, but we shall see him again I expect... Let's go over to the wall before we go in."

The wind was still blowing hard and broken clouds streamed like tattered banners across the sky, giving them glimpses of the moon riding high over the Marsh. Dungeness still flashed its warning and a few lights in the houses down by the river below reminded them that the citizens of Rye were not all in bed yet. A few yards away the sign of the wicked old *Dolphin* creaked as David lifted the twins on to the wall.

"Another year and you'll be able to see over the top," he laughed. "Have you enjoyed your day, chaps? We'll have to write to Peter and Tom and Jenny to-morrow."

"We know you'll be writing to Peter," Mary said, "but we'll do a report for the others. Yes, thank you. We have enjoyed ourselves and it's only poor darling Mackie who's licking his wounds. If his cut paw isn't better to-morrow we'll take him to a vet. and make the Ballinger pay... I know it's peculiar, but I felt almost sorry for her at the end."

"I didn't," Dickie said. "She's wicked and cruel and I still hate her, but I do hope Jon and Penny have got something else arranged for us to-morrow 'cos Rye won't be the same without her."

Jon did not answer but moved over to Penny, who was standing at the end of the line with her elbows on the top of the wall.

"Sorry it's over, Newpenny?"

"Yes and no. It seems a bit flat now, doesn't it?" she said quietly without looking round.

"Something I wanted to ask you," Jon went on. "Why did you yell like that when I jumped out of the boat?"

She fingered the green beads at her throat.

"What a stupid question," she replied after a long pause. "A wave must have splashed over my boots," and then with a smile at him over her shoulder she ran back into the *Dolphin*. Jon stuffed his hands into his pockets and without looking at the others walked slowly after her.

Arlette watched them go and when David said, "And you, Arlette? How do you like England after to-day?" she answered,

"Oh, Daveed! Thank you. I like it ver', ver' much."

THE END

Written at Toft House, Downside Road, Guildford.

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